

Is God Really A Good God?

October 11, 2015 Message by John DuBall

INTRO: (Each person received either a penny, nickel, dime, quarter, \$1, or \$5 bill.)

I gave every person that walked in this morning a gift. I give it to you with NO strings attached. It is YOURS to use as you desire. I do have some ideas of how you can use it to get the most benefit from it and if you want my thoughts on this, I invite you to come and ask me. What I've given you is something good, but it can be used for evil. I want you to have it. I am excited to give it to you, because it has the potential to do more than you can imagine at this moment. Please accept my gift and use it wisely. Thank you.

Q: May I ask you some questions about this gift that you have been given? (pause)

PPT: ... Did you do anything to earn that gift? (no)

PPT: ... Did you have any part in creating that gift or was it just handed to you? (no)

PPT: ... Did I put any stipulations on the gift and how you had to use it? (no)

PPT: ... Are you happy with this gift? I invite you think about that now & in the future.

PPT: ... Do you have complete control over that gift once I placed it in your hands? (yes)

A.. Remember this little interaction as we talk about our topic today, "Is God Really A Good God?"

For the most part - God has given us the FREEDOM to choose what to do with the GIFTS he has given us. NOW - He, being God, STILL HAS THE RIGHT to overrule our freedom. But most of the time, he does not do that. Why is that? THIS is the one of the most complex theological issues that people have sought answers for over thousands of years. But let me bring it down to a personal level. Let's take a recent incident in our country...

B.. **ILL:** How do you answer someone who asks,

PPT: *"Why did my child have to die by the hands of an angry 26 year old man in Oregon 11 days ago? Where was this good God in that?"* Christopher Harper-Mercer killed nine people that day and injured nine others.

He broke into the classroom, told the professor teaching the class, "I've been waiting to do this for years," and shot him point blank. While reloading his handgun, the man ordered the students to stand up and asked whether they were Christians "And they would stand up, and he said, 'Good, because you're a Christian, you're going to see God in just about one second,' " "And then he shot and killed them."

Now whether you're a follower of Jesus or not, the question is still valid... Where WAS GOD in the midst of this? Why did he allow this to happen? How do you answer the person? (pause)

I think it is interesting to see what the possible future presidential candidates have to say about this...

PPT: Bobby Jindall: *"This killer's father is now lecturing us on the need for gun control and he says he has no idea how or where his son got the guns... You know why he doesn't know? Because he is not, and has never been in his son's life. He's a complete failure as a father, he should be embarrassed to even show his face in public. He's the problem here."*

PPT: Hillary Clinton: *"What is wrong with us, that we can't stand up to the NRA and the gun lobby, and the gun manufacturers they represent? You know, this is not just tragic. We don't just need to pray for people. We need to act, and we need to build a movement."*

PPT: Mike Huckabee: *"We have not so much a gun problem; we have a problem with sin and evil. This is an evil thing, when people kill another person."*

So maybe they are partially right...

- 1) It was the father's fault! (maybe he had some part of it, but can he hold all the blame?)
- 2) It was the people who make and allow for guns fault! (they had a part in it, but can they hold all the blame?)
- 3) It is "evil's" fault (yes, we are all tempted and sin, but who are we to BLAME for this?)

One of toughest questions I've been asked in this area is,

PPT: "Why does God value the freedom of the one doing evil MORE than the freedom of the victim? How can you say there is an all-powerful, all-loving God when evil is allowed to run so rampant in our world?"

Q: How would you answer that person? (Pause)

Paul Little, in his book, How To Give Away Your Faith, described the seven biggest questions that skeptical college students ask about Christianity. He answers this question, "If God is all-good and all-powerful, why do the innocent suffer? Why are some babies born blind or mentally defective or deformed? Why are wars allowed? Why?..." Little responds, "Either God is all-good, but He is not powerful enough to eliminate disease and disaster; or He is all-powerful, but He is not all-good and therefore He does not end evil.

Once again I think we must admit our partial ignorance. We don't have the full explanation of the origin and problem of evil because God has chosen to reveal only a part of it to us. We are clearly told, though, that God created the universe perfect. Man was given the freedom to obey God or disobey. Evil came into the universe through man's disobedience. Because of the pattern of the universe, man's actions are not limited to himself but always involve other people. Because man disobeyed and broke God's law, evil pervades the universe.

As we discuss this question, we mustn't overlook the presence of evil in every one of us. Many people ask, "Why doesn't God step in and get rid of evil? Why doesn't He stomp out war?" They do not realize that if God exercised judgment uniformly, not one of us would survive. Suppose God were to decree, "At midnight tonight, all evil will be stamped out of the universe." Which of us would be here at 1:00 am? (p. 208, Where Is God When Bad Things Happen? Luis Palau)

Here is where I am at today in trying to help us formulate an answer to those who are HONESTLY struggling with the pain of wondering where God is at...

Q: What would you say is the greatest, most important, above-all, highest character quality that exists?

Is it hope, integrity, joy, peace, love, faith, humble, loyal, good, bold, strong... out of hundreds of character traits, what would say is the most important one? (get feedback)

Answer: Love

ILL: In March, 2014, a research team put together a list of every No. 1 Billboard "Hot 100" hit from January 1960 to December 2009. Then, they ran a textual analysis of the songs' lyrics via a computer program. Guess what the top theme was?

#1: LOSS of love!

#2: DESIRE (to be loved, accepted, valued)

It appears, that there is a pretty universal idea that LOVE is the highest, most sought after trait that most humans want. Who created the concept of "love?" I believe this is one of the greatest arguments FOR God. It goes against survival of the fittest mentality because it entails a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of another.

So if LOVE IS THE GREATEST OF ALL TRAITS, what creates the OPPORTUNITY to experience the fullness of this quality? To give and receive love, you must have FREEDOM of the WILL to choose it or reject it. It cannot be forced or coerced.

PPT: It says in Genesis that “God created us in His own image” (Genesis 1:27). This is so much more than just a physical trait.

It means that he anointed us with a FREEDOM to choose & to choose to embrace HIS ideal of love over all others. BUT WITH THIS GREAT GIFT COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY (which is NOT a direct quote from a Spiderman movie!) To have REAL freedom means the opportunity to CHOOSE evil.

So... if God gave FREE WILL to humans, he has to allow the possibility of them misusing that freedom, even if it means wounding others.

PPT: In Hebrews 10:16, we are reminded that since Jesus came and sent his Holy Spirit to us after he rose from the dead after his horrendous death, *“This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”*

There is the HIGHEST moral code that is inherent in each of us. Some will reject that responsibility and some will embrace it. TRUE freedom is the choice to love and build one other up or it is to selfishly harm another for your own benefit. These two key factors, LOVE & FREEDOM are woven into highest calling of our lives!

ILL: If I told you that gift of money I gave you at the start MUST be used in a way that I demand, would that give you the freedom to chose?

I GAVE out of a sense of JOY so you might experience what I know this gift can bring.

Now, you don't know right now what I think would be the best thing for you to do with that money. It might be something different for each one of you, but it would entail something that would benefit more than just yourself!

In fact, here is what I would do to find out how important you believed that gift was I gave you. I wouldn't tell your right away what to do with it. I would ask you to follow me around and see if you could discover what MY GREATEST PRIORITIES WERE.

PPT: I would ask you questions like...

... what activities do you see me doing?

... who am I interacting with and how am I treating them?

... what traits do you see coming through?

... how am I using my resources?

Then I would ask, *“Where do you think you would like to use the gift I gave you?”* You saw what I did. I hope it was an example to you. I seek to walk alongside those that are hurting, I confront those who are erring so they might experience forgiveness & reconciliation, and share with those in need. NOW... it is your choice on how you will use what I gave you... and there is more than one good or bad choice!

KEY: The RISK OF FREEDOM gives a person the GREATEST POSSIBLE POTENTIAL FOR GOOD.

The inverse is also true. The same potential for good can also BE USED FOR EVIL!

Can I share a theory I have with you? Some of you got \$5 bills and some of you got a penny when you walked in. Here is what often happens that gets us humans messed up. We start comparing the gift we got with others and it makes us feel less valuable. So we get selfish real fast and find ourselves wanting MORE! Like Adam & Eve when they looked at the one tree they weren't suppose to take from. Or Cain when he realized his offering was not as good as his brothers. Or Joseph's brothers as they watched their father give

Joseph more affection and praise than they got. Jealousy, envy, comparison, greed... all start their evil work on a heart early on and blind a person to the "good" they were meant to experience.

Q: Did you experience any of that? Were you interested in what other people got? When you got a penny did you think... "this is really pretty worthless?" (pause)

Now... I make a lot of mistakes and I am not trying to be God with this illustration. He has the insights to know WHEN to intervene and take away someone's freedom for the sake of another. He has the power to restore because he has broken the power of sin and death in a way that evil does NOT have the final word. What we don't know has to be left in HIS hands.

BUT I DO make the choice to embrace HIS way of living and make it my own because of HIS great love for me.

CONCLUSION: Let me come back to this question: *Is God a good God?*

We will be exploring this more in future sessions. But let's see a little more God's answer to that question...

PPT: "This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted". John3:16-17 MSG

I hope I have given you some answers to that question, but I want to challenge you about the choices YOU make and how they actually impact your life and the people around you. (Matthew 25:31-45)

PPT: "When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne. Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, putting sheep to his right and goats to his left.

PPT: ³⁴⁻³⁶ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why:

I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.'

PPT: ³⁷⁻⁴⁰ "Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.'

PPT: ⁴¹⁻⁴³ "Then he will turn to the 'goats,' the ones on his left, and say, 'Get out, worthless goats! You're good for nothing but the fires of hell. And why? Because—

I was hungry and you gave me no meal,
I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,
I was homeless and you gave me no bed,
I was shivering and you gave me no clothes,
Sick and in prison, and you never visited.'

PPT: ⁴⁴ "Then those 'goats' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or homeless or shivering or sick or in prison and didn't help?'

⁴⁵ "He will answer them, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me—you failed to do it to me.'

Philip Yancey states at the end of his book, *What Good Is God? In Search of A Faith That Matters*, (p. 287)

Often when people pose a question like, "What good is God?" they are asking why God doesn't intervene more directly and with more force. Why did God let Hitler do so much damage, or Stalin, or Mao? Why doesn't God take a more active role in human history? I can think of several possible reasons. According to the Old Testament, God did take an active and forceful role in the past, yet it failed to produce lasting results among the Israelites. And, as earthly powers have learned, force and freedom make uneasy partners and an emphasis on one always diminishes the other; God consistently tilts toward human freedom. In the end, though, we have no sure answer and only fleeting glimpses of God's ultimate plan.

For whatever reason, God chooses to make himself known primarily through ordinary people like us. Yet again, I recall my friend Joanna's clear statement that took place in Pollsmoor Prison: "Well, of course, Philip, God was already present in the prison. I just had to make him visible." The question, "What good is God?" is an open question whose answer God has invested in us his followers. *We* are the ones called to demonstrate a faith that matters to a watching world."

You have a choice everyday of what you will do with the FREEDOM and gift of LOVE that God has given you. He is working through YOU to BATTLE THE EVIL OF THIS WORLD! You ARE the LIGHT of the WORLD to show others, through YOUR ACTIONS, that there IS A GOD who weeps with those who weep, your rejoices with those that rejoice!