

GOODNESS

By Nell Truesdell

The idea of excellence comes to the fore when we consider the word goodness. Goodness is an attribute of God who fills heaven and earth; "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." Some of the merits of goodness are that it satisfies, it endures, it crowns the years, it fills the hungry soul.

There is a certain worth in goodness that remains spotless, immaculate, clean, regardless of circumstances. It is an attribute that is to be exalted and intensified in the consciousness. God, of course, is the source of goodness and the wise man goes direct to the Source for whatever he seeks. By association, man incorporates in his own consciousness the finer qualities that constitute godliness.

The worth of an individual is what attracts us. Unworthiness repels and disgusts us, for it affects our own estimation of ourselves. Deep within each one is an interior estimate that is the foundation stone upon which the feet are firmly set. We value the people and things that confirm and fortify that estimate.

In our Scripture, the personality that exudes the true spirit of goodness is Ruth, the Moabitess, grandmother of Jesse who begat David. The story of Ruth has never failed to fascinate students of literature through the centuries. It is told simply and the rustic idyl of the doings of people from the plains of Moab to the hills of Bethlehem is like a clean breath of fresh cut clover from a verdant meadow.

The little book of four chapters was written at a late period in the history of the Hebrews after the Exile. It was composed about 400 B.C. but the story has to do with the experiences of a little circle of people who lived during the time when Judges ruled Israel, centuries before.

The story begins with hardship. A famine was in the land of Bethlehem - Judah and Elimelech, with his wife and their two sons, left their home to seek better pastures in the foreign country of Moab. Ten years passed during which Naomi lost her husband and her two sons, Chilion and Mahlon, who had married women of Moab, Orpah and Ruth.

After the two boys died, Naomi, on hearing that the Lord had prospered her people in Bethlehem, longed to return to her homeland. She was confronted with the problem of what to do about her two daughters-in-law. After the three women had traveled a short distance toward Judah, Naomi, the most experienced, began to remember what it had meant to her to have moved, with her husband, into a foreign land. Here, on the other hand, two young women bereft of husbands, were going with her into a strange country. What would their possibilities for marriage be in Judah? for Jews did not marry foreigners readily.

As Naomi thought these things over, she came to the conclusion that it would be better if the girls remained in their own land and tried to gain husbands for themselves of their own people. So, she gave the girls her blessing and bade them return, each to her mother's house; and she prayed that the Lord would deal kindly with them, as they had dealt kindly with their late

husbands and her. Naomi hoped with all her heart each would find husbands (the only security they could attain in those days), and live at peace.

The girls, who evidently really loved Naomi, declared they would continue on with her, but Naomi reasoned with them, telling them that she could not offer them hope as she had no more sons they could marry. Orpah, the practical type, took this counsel seriously and kissed her mother-in-law goodbye. But Ruth somehow could not bring herself to leave the old woman to travel the great distance homeward alone.

The goodness in her heart poured itself through her words: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people and thy God my God: where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."

Nowhere in all literature is a speech of such selfless devotion recorded between two human beings. Because of it, Naomi set herself to guard the future of this girl who would choose death rather than be parted from her.

In time the two women returned to Bethlehem where Naomi was recognized and welcomed. But she was bitter in heart because she had left her homeland with husband and sons and now had returned destitute. Though it was April, and Springtime painted the hills with grass and lilies fresh sprung from the earth, and in the fields the barley was ready for harvest, Naomi's heart was gloomy over her future prospects. She was too old to hope to marry again, and her husband's property had passed into the hands of strangers.

But there was Ruth, young and doubtless beautiful. Perhaps Ruth would fare well, and, if the Lord was with them, would marry a man capable of taking care of both women.

Naomi, of course, needed food for herself and Ruth, and, as they talked about it, wondered how to procure it. Ruth made the suggestion that she go to a field where she would be allowed to glean grain after the reapers, and Naomi gave her consent. By chance, she happened to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was a kindred of Naomi's late husband, Elimelech.

Now it happened that Boaz came out from Bethlehem to watch the reapers, and when he saw Ruth, he asked of the servant who was set over the reapers who she was. He was told she was the Moabitish damsel who had come back with Naomi out the country of Moab. Evidently more was told Boaz for, when Ruth asked if she might continue to glean after the reapers, Boaz was very generous with her. He told her not to go to another field to glean; he instructed the young men not to get familiar with the girl; and he told Ruth that, when she was thirsty, she might drink the water the men had drawn. This was an unheard of courtesy in a land where women drew water for the men. Ruth was overcome, and fell on her face and bowed herself to the ground and asked why she had found favor in his eyes when he knew she was a stranger.

The words of the story are: "And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been showed me all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband; and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and come unto a people which thou knowest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to rest."

Ruth told him how she appreciated his kindness and he generously invited her to come to eat bread with the reapers at mealtime, and dip her morsel in the vinegar; and he himself passed her parched corn. After the meal, Boaz instructed his reapers to let her glean even among the sheaves, and to drop purposely some of their grain as they reaped.

After she beat out the grain she had gleaned she joyfully took it home to Naomi. Of course, Naomi was full of questions: Where hast thou gleaned today? and where wroughtest thou?

When Ruth said she had gleaned in the field of Boaz, Naomi praised God for his kindness in having led the girl to harvest in the field of a near kinsman of her late husband. She instructed Ruth to keep fast by the maidens of Boaz and not to go to another field. So Ruth was allowed to glean through the barley harvest and through the wheat harvest in the fields of Boaz.

As we continue the story, we must keep before us the realization that the customs of the day applied to a particular period in the history of the Jews. Naomi advised her daughter-in-law how to conduct herself in the presence of Boaz, and eventually both women were rewarded by Boaz taking Ruth for his wife.

The innate goodness of the man himself, however, is not to be overlooked. He was not next in line either to redeem the property of Elimelech and his sons, or to marry Ruth in order to "raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance." So, in the presence of ten men of the elders of the city, he openly gave the opportunity to a nearer kinsman, which, to his relief, was refused. Then, in the presence of the witnesses, Boaz bought the property of Elimelech and his sons, and bought Ruth, the Moabitess, wife of the dead Mahlon, to make her his own.

In time Ruth bore a son who was named Obed, who became the father of Jesse, who begat David. Naomi was overjoyed, and women friends rejoicing with her said, "Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him."

As we ponder this story, we realize that it was not just the physical attraction of Ruth that brought so much blessing into her life. It was an excellence, a worth, a goodness that permeated her being to such a degree that she herself was a blessing to all who were close to her. She believed in the God of the Hebrews, and that God would lead her into her highest good in a strange country. The goodness in her heart brought into her life the goodness of the environment in which she dwelt.

She was stouthearted, courageous, kind, benevolent, gracious, well-behaved, friendly, virtuous, and gave pleasure to all who served her. Her inherent quality could not be denied, no matter where she was. And her goodness was tempered with mercy.

We recall the story of the Good Samaritan who illustrates this virtue. The man's sense of mercy compelled him to help a foreigner who was in dire straits.

(The quality seems to be dormant in many people everywhere. But that should urge the truth student to practice it in greater degree.)

The character of Jesus radiated goodness. His generosity could not fail to draw toward him people of all types and kind who needed the warmth of his kindness and mercy. His spirit of compassion and forgiveness urged him to do healing works among crowds though he needed rest from long hours of labor. Twice, when great crowds followed him into the desert country, he could not turn them homeward without feeding them. His disciples had no such feelings: they insisted that he disperse the crowds: This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away.

But Jesus could not. He sued his strength to provide sufficient food and not until all had been fed, did he send the people away. Immediately after, he sent his own disciples away, and retired into a mountain apart to pray.

If we feel we should like to exercise this attribute more full, we must be careful not to over do. It is a trait that easily can be exploited by those who have little conscience. True goodness does not make a door-mat out of a person. While he may at times seem to be imposed upon, his innate goodness will tell him how far to go. It will protect and defend him, just as the innocence of a child guards and preserves him from transgression.

Often the desire to do good takes the form of lavish efforts at charity. Many worthy people need only a boost to send them along the highroad to greater self-sufficiency. But the charity that assumes full obligation to care for people, leaves them helpless and incompetent, and with appetites to get something for nothing at the cost of their manhood and womanhood.

God knows the need of each of us. Would that we were wise enough to open our hearts so that we might receive instruction and inspiration to know how to alleviated the needs that arise.

Jesus met his daily needs just as you and I meet them. He did not anticipate all the incidents in his life any more than you or I know whether we shall bake a cake or take a ride tomorrow. With his vision steadfast on the Father, he was prepared to meet every situation with a true understanding of the motives behind each, especially when he was dealing with human beings.

It is my firm belief that each of us in is the place in this life where he can do himself the most good. Unless there is a willingness that wells up from within, rather than strives to conform to outward ways of solving problems, we are harassed and disappointed. But if there is a deep desire to understand the Principle rather than an attempt to deal with the shifting appearances, the secret of every condition, circumstance, or situation is soon discerned and the outlook changed.

Goodness abides in every heart. We who are seeking to understand more of God can be thankful for the unusual proportion of this divine quality active in us. If we continue to exercise it, we shall have more of it; and the more we have of it, the greater demand to exercise it will appear. Above this, it is itself a reward to the individual so blessed as to be able to perform under its spell. It draws itself unto itself through others and even through the things around about, and stirs responses that shower rich blessings of untold values upon the investor.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

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SPIRITICITY April 1948

MORE EXCELLENT WAYS

By A. J. Truesdell

All of us have had the experience of being forced to make a correct decision at a critical time, and of reaping a certain sense of relief from the experience. It may be we had rejected the impulse to reply in kind to some hasty word expressed by a relative or friend under stress. Or, some situation which seemed intolerable arose and we had the presence of mind to keep on in our aspiration until a subtle change cleared the atmosphere.

Life is full of opportunity to fight fire with fire and scatter teeth for teeth. But except our righteousness exceeds that of others we have no claim to greater privileges and advantages. In our actual refraining from caustic responses we may be surprised to learn that we are turning the other cheek; if we feel no tendency to condemn others we are practicing a Christian principle of judging not. After all, our judgments of each other are much in the nature of small children making faces at each other and calling names. An adult watches such antics with tolerance knowing the crisis will pass and that the faces and names are but temporary expressions of uninhibited progeny.

Although we are instructed to enter the Kingdom as a little child, experience with spiritual verities reveals an adult attitude emerging from the realm celestial which reminds us that though in malice we are to be as children, in understanding we are to be men. We are in constant process of growing to the full stature of this spiritual adult. This is why a correct decision reacts so pleasantly. It promotes growth, adds dignity, and causes the practitioner to grow in favor with God and man. An adult can reproduce; he can display a poise that is conducive to social welfare. "Acquit yourselves like men."

We would not turn the management of our affairs or estates over to undeveloped minds though they might have hidden genius. They must first be proved to have market value. Proved ability is assurance of provision.

As a fisherman must overhaul his tackle, or an artisan must keep his tools sharpened and tempered, just so does the Lord seem to test and temper the people he would use to his purpose. God does not destroy any equipment, but he does require obedience and proper response. Opportunities are provided for self-testing, and through the practice of self-discipline a man finds his option with the Lord taken up and renewed. A man who behaves like a spoiled brat who runs and hides at the slightest provocation must not be surprised to have his inheritance relegated to another who seems less qualified. The way of discipleship is a rigorous and relentless way. It exacts the proverbial eye and tooth, and makes nothing perfect; but it does prepare the consciousness of the ideas of discipline.

While the law is fixed and will not be destroyed, short cuts are available whereby the apprentice rapidly becomes a law-abiding citizen. E.g. when you

offer your gift at the alter and there remember some difference between you and your brother, go and be reconciled, then return to the alter with the gift. Love one another. Whatsoever ye would that men do unto you, do ye even so to them. Other steps are revealed as the aspirant progresses. All such practices constitute tests and examinations which enable men to check their qualifications for participating in the more excellent way.

Jesus looked upon the young man who had kept all the laws from childhood, and loved him. But he did not praise him for his good behavior. He advised him to sell all he had and give to the poor.

As immigrants scrape, and save all they can to provide passage money to come to this country, so must one, though prosperous in the sight of the law, be willing to relinquish all for the excellency of the Christ way. No true friend would advise the aspiring European to make the best of what he had where he was, for to him this country is the promised land, worth every sacrifice to achieve admittance. Much more good is obtained quickly in this area than is possible in the old region, and what has been sacrificed to get here is a comparative pittance to what is gained.

What ever is relinquished in favor of the more excellent way will be returned with a high rate of interest. Jesus set the rate at 100%. "The law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did." The law is used to make demonstrations. It demands; but we must learn as Job and Paul discovered, that God gives not according to measure, but according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

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SPIRITICITY April 1948

LOVE

By R. A. Applegate, Jr.

Poets and novelists have idealized and idolized personal possessive love. But the greatest and only true love seeks not to have and hold, but only to give. In giving of its very self, it draws unto itself all, for it is a law on all planes that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Thus love giving out, pushing all things from itself, draws unto itself everything.

It is an ineluctable law that whoever gives out love will be loved in return. The recipient may not be the same one who returns the love, but the law works nevertheless. There was never a person who loved much who was not loved in return.

It is a mystery hid from most that all love is God and all love is for God. Many have accepted John's statement that God is love, but not all have realized that God is all the love there is and that there is no love that is not God. Further, they have not realized that the same God-in-action is all that they love. If they knew this, they would not seek to be loved, nor would they fear losing the love of loved ones.

Jesus said that we should love God with all our hearts. Since looking Godward precedes loving him, if we look toward him we cannot help loving him who first loved us. If we love God we shall love our fellows, for it is all the same love.

Alphabet of
DAILY MEDITATIONS
For Every Week Day of the Month

April 1948

1. Hear My voice: let thine ears be ATTENTIVE.
2. It is BETTER to trust in the Lord.
3. Thou, O God, art a God full of COMPASSION.

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5. DRAW nigh unto God.
6. The ETERNAL God is thy refuge.
7. Be ye therefore FOLLOWERS of God.
8. GROW in GRACE and in the knowledge of GOD.
9. In the shadow of HIS HAND HATH HE HID me.
10. I will INSTRUCT thee and teach thee.

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12. In Thy Presence is fulness of JOY.
13. Wise men lay up KNOWLEDGE.
14. To me to LIVE is Christ.
15. Let the Lord be MAGNIFIED
16. But one thing is NEEDFUL.
17. Now therefore, my son, OBEY My voice.

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19. Live in PEACE.
20. Many waters cannot QUENCH Love.
21. His RIGHTEOUSNESS endureth forever.
22. His glory SHALL be SEEN upon thee.
23. He will guide you into all TRUTH.
24. In UNDERSTANDING be men.

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26. The VOICE of the Lord is powerful.
27. Ye also shall bear WITNESS.
28. He shall lift YOU up.
29. Be ZEALOUS.
30. What think ye of the Christ?

DAILY MEDITATION upon such statements as these lift the
consciousness God-ward. We invite you to join us in daily prayer.