

II. Group Discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement on an answer. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.*

1. How does our culture define goodness? Reflect on pictures of goodness on TV and in the movies.

What does this reveal about how the culture understands the purpose of human existence?

Read Luke 10:29-37 aloud

2. What surprises you most about this story?

Which do you think is more remarkable, the Samaritan's act of goodness or the fact that the priest and the Levite walked right by the dying man on the road? Why?

This story is commonly called "The Parable of the Good Samaritan." But notice that in the story Jesus nowhere calls the Samaritan good. Do you think the Samaritan was doing anything especially heroic in this story, or was he doing what any decent person would most likely do?

3. What was Jesus trying to get across with this story?

What does this story reveal about our purpose as Christians living in the world?

Read Romans 3:9-12 and 7:18-20.

4. What do these verses say about human nature?

How does this view square with "Self-Help" philosophy?

Should we trust our own notions of what is good? Why or why not?

Read 2 Peter 1:3-4

5. Where do the moral resources for becoming good come from? From looking within?

6. Do you think that Christians generally pay enough attention to moral formation? Explain.

7. How can confession of sin help cultivate the fruit of goodness?

8. Why did Paul frequently urge other Christians to imitate himself? *2 Tim. 3:10-15; 1 Thess. 1:4-7; 1 Cor. 4:16-17; 11:1; Phil. 4:8-9*

What are the dangers of imitating others? What are the dangers of *not* imitating mature Christians?

Are you comfortable with imitating other Christians? With others imitating you? Why or why not?

III. Cultivating goodness *Practical suggestions and reflections to help participants connect the discussion to their daily lives. Challenge each person to try at least one of these each week.*

Who are some people in your church who exhibit the fruit of goodness? Pray that God will give you courage to ask them if you might spend some time with them occasionally. Perhaps you can build a life-long relationship in which some of their goodness will "rub off" on you.

Does your group practice confession? It is usually easier and more appropriate for confession to take place when the men and women can meet in separate rooms of the house. Remember two principles: 1) confession should never be manipulated or forced, and 2) confession often begets confession; in other words, when the leader confesses, someone also might find the courage to confess.

IV. Other resources

The point – It is easy for Christians to let our notions of what is good arise from popular culture or from turning inward (self-help). Yet, when we submit to the direction of the Holy Spirit, we come much closer to cultivating Christ-like goodness, which *always* exists for the sake of others (Mt. 5:16).

Reflecting Deeper...

Kenneson writes:

“...we often find ourselves justifying our lack of goodness by resorting to the ever-popular slogan, “I’m only human.”... For us, God’s desires for human life are defined by reflecting on the life of Jesus. Thus the Christian affirmation that Jesus was fully human should serve as a welcome reminder that “human” is not simply synonymous with “prone to error or sin.” Rather, in the light of Jesus’ life we come to realize that our problem is not that we are “only human” but that we are not human *enough*. Blaming our shortcomings on our humanity, therefore, makes a mockery not only of the life of Jesus but also of the lives of those saints throughout the ages who have sought to be human in the ways that he was human.”

- *Life on the Vine*, pg. 162

Prayer *Creative suggestions for group prayer.*

Pray Psalm 34 aloud. Spend time in quiet reflection on the goodness of God. Ask God to impart His goodness into our hearts.

Kid-friendly activity

An activity designed to help kids and adults connect the scripture to their lives. Works best when adults participate in the activity with the kids.

Read Luke 10:29-37 aloud. Select several people to act out this story (cast: a man who gets beat up, 2 robbers, a priest, a Levite, a Samaritan, the innkeeper, and the donkey! ☺)

What was it that the Samaritan did that was good?

What are 3 good works that you can do this week to bless others?

Pray that God will give everyone the strength to carry out what they said they would do.

Life on the vine: Goodness

Small group guide based on

Life on the Vine, by Philip Kenneson (IVP, 1999. ISBN 0830822194)

www.saltandlightresources.com

By John Grant, Jon Camp, Trey Finley, and Ben Siburt

Theme: How do we evaluate goodness, and how can we cultivate this fruit in our lives?

In his book, *Life on the Vine*, Kenneson remarks that we Christians often act as if we have it all together at church, yet spend the rest of the week not wanting to appear “too good” in front of our non-Christian acquaintances. We must constantly heed God’s calling for us to “let our light shine” before others.

This discussion guide will invite participants to consider how the fruit of goodness functions in their lives.

Leadership tip: Watch for ways to live the principles you are discussing. If a member of the group expresses a need, take steps to get the group or the congregation involved in helping. Look at yourself as a shepherd and servant of the group.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ Do you have a living role model? How would you describe this person’s life?
- ❖ Are Christians you know really that different from the non-Christians you know? What are some similarities/differences?
- ❖ What would you like your epitaph to say?