

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro
2 November 2025

10:30 a.m. MT Worship
Fruit of GOODNESS Sunday (Personal/Theological)

Calvary Baptist Church
Denver, Colorado

“The Through Line of Goodness”

First Sermon in *Cultivating the Fruit of GOODNESS*
Part of *Abide & Grow: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit*

NOTE: A sermon is a spoken word event. This manuscript served as a guide but is not exact to what was preached in the moment.

Genesis 1:26-31; Psalm 23

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

And so we begin our exploration of the Fruit of Goodness by unpacking it's theological foundations.

Perhaps when you hear that word—*goodness*—and it makes you think of all the things you were told as a kid that you needed to do in order to be a “good boy” or a “good girl.”

“Be a good girl and do the dishes.”

“Be a good boy and take out the trash.”

“Good boys say ‘yes sir.’”

“Good girls don’t talk back.”

Or does anyone remember this rhyme?

What are little boys made of?

Snips, snails

And puppy-dogs' tails

That's what little boys are made of.

What are little girls made of?

Sugar and spice

And everything nice

That's what little girls are made of.¹

When I was a kid, this rhyme was cross-stitched and framed, hanging in the bathroom I shared with my brother. It never made much sense to me, but also—what’s up with body getting to be made of puppy dog tails?! I was the kid in our family who loved our dog, and my brother is the one who likes to cook, so we can give the sugar and spices to him! And, were boys not also made of “everything nice”...or is this implying that “niceness” is expected from girls, but not boys? I could go on. This is problematic poetry at its best

Whether it’s this rhyme or one of the innumerable other cultural messages many of us

¹ Accessed on November 2, 2025 at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What_Are_Little_Boys_M](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What_Are_Little_Boys_Made_Of)

[ade_Of%3F#cite_note-4](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What_Are_Little_Boys_Made_Of#cite_note-4) advice-to-the-bront%C3%AB-sisters-78c50d774b.

received as kids, the idea of “goodness” and “being good” is so commonplace in our culture and so traditionally gendered in a binary way—with a boys’ goodness being connected to his intellect and strength and ability to provide, and a girls’ goodness being connected to her docileness and beauty and nurturing qualities—that is no wonder that many of us internalized these gendered expectations of goodness. And even more, the Church hasn’t helped over the centuries! We also have propagated a malformed theological understanding of goodness because of the idea of “original sin” (which is not biblical, by the way!). So culture and theology have compounded this impact of “goodness” being connected to our *behavior*, rather than the truth that goodness is inherent to us as *beloved* children of God.

In the creation story of our faith, what God creates God calls good (*tov*, in the Hebrew):

Light and Darkness – *tov*
 Water and Sky – *tov*
 Oceans and Land, Plants and
 Trees – *tov*
 Sun, Moon, and Stars – *tov*
 Insects and Birds – *tov*

Cattle, Creeping Things, and
 Wild Animals – *tov*

And then God creates humans in the *imago dei* (image or likeness of God) and God gives us the privilege and responsibility of stewardship (or care) to all of creation, and calls us human stewards—created in the *imago dei* (image of God)—*tov meod*. Which means “very or exceedingly good.”

That’s right. We are not created and called “sinful.” We are created and called VERY GOOD! And while God does create us to be stewards of all of creation, God does not connect our ‘goodness’ to our ‘success or failure as stewards.’ The proclamation of ‘very good’ comes as a statement separate from our behavior. God “saw everything God had made” and “indeed, it was very good.” *Tov meod*.

When God looks at you, God sees goodness.

If you struggle to understand and tap into your inherent goodness, you are not alone. Our culture and distorted theology—based on controlling people with guilt about bad behavior (aka sin)—has led us to believe that we start out ‘bad’

and are just always trying to climb our way up and out of ‘being bad’ to ‘being good.’ Or at least being ‘good enough’ for God to accept us and get us into heaven. How little credit such a theology gives the Creator of the Universe?! To dare say that what God has created God would not want to be in the presence of, always and forever! After all, God become Emmanuel—God *with* us. And then God becomes the indwelling Holy Spirit—God *within* us. We cannot be separated from God even if we wanted to be!

In fact, we learn in the second creation story in Genesis 2 that God breathes God’s very spirit (*ruach*) into us. With sacred breath and ordinary dust, God’s Goodness is infused in us from the beginning. The Through Line of God’s Goodness, simply stated, is that WE are Good, through and through.

This is a good place to pause and remind ourselves of the definition of the Fruit of Goodness from our Abide & Grow theme verse of Galatians 5:22. In the Greek the word is ἀγαθωσύνη *agathōsýnē* which

means uprightness of heart and life, goodness, kindness, beneficence, generosity, working for the well-being of all, acting in the best interest of others.

From the “very good” of our creation to the “goodness” of which the Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 5, there is a Through Line (or constant)² of goodness that speaks to stewardship and care and well-being, and collective responsibility for all.

In other words, what helps us cultivate the Fruit of Goodness—or sharing “goods” with others and creating “good” in the world—is understanding the theological foundation from Genesis: that we are created and proclaimed as “very good.” When we *claim* this identity of “very good,” we are also claiming our responsibility of being “good stewards”—of caring for those around us, tapping into the uprightness of heart that leads us to be kind and beneficent, that inspires us to be stewards of all that God has entrusted to us.

Yet the Through Line (or constant) of God’s goodness is

² A Through Line is “a common or consistent element or theme shared by items in a series or by parts of a whole; consistent theme or element that runs from the beginning

to the end of a narrative or a story.”
(<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/through%20line>).

not just a *theological identity* from Genesis *and* a *calling* from Galatians to cultivate this fruit and practice of goodness. God's goodness is also a *theological promise grounded in lived experience*.

In the beloved Psalm 23, a young song-writing shepherd sings from the perspective of a sheep who understands his whole life is lived by following the leading of his divine Shepherd—the One who feeds, nourishes, guides, rescues, protects, comforts, reconciles, anoints, and blesses him—from his first day until his last—the testimony of the psalmist in Psalm 23 is that God's gift of goodness (instilled in us at our creation), is a gift and promise that lasts our whole lives long, e!

The word “goodness” in Psalm 23 is the same root word for “good” in Genesis 1. *Tov*. The Goodness the Psalmist is talking about is not a behavioral goodness (like being a good girl or boy) nor is it a goodness like (everything that happens in my life is gonna be “good!” as in fun/easy/celebratory). The Goodness the Psalmist is talking about it is that same generous, kind, stewarding Goodness

that's given to us at our creation.

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me, all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.” (Psalm 23:6). “The house of the Lord” is a phrase that often refers to life on earth and also life in eternity (in other words, our whole existence with God).

There is a reason we read this psalm at memorial services. The promise of God's goodness not just in our life on earth, but in life after death too. The word “follow” here in the Hebrew is רָדַף *râdaph*, which means “*to pursue, run after, attend closely to.*” The Goodness of our God does not passively follow behind us like a limp blanky that we drag around. No, the Goodness of our God, is more like a very attentive Golden Retriever, attending to us, pursuing us wherever we go, never leaving our side following us from the bathroom to the bed, from the kitchen to the couch. Desiring to be by us, always...because...well, where else would they want to be? God's goodness is right there beside us, behind us, around us, within us—always and in all

ways—all the days of our life and beyond.

At our creation, God's goodness is instilled *within us*. Here during our life on earth, God's goodness is *with us*. And God's goodness follows us across the threshold from Here to the Hereafter...never leaving us.

In the calm times of cool waters and in enjoying green pastures, and also in the fear-filled, treacherous unknown times of deep valleys—from our birth into this world and across the threshold of death to whatever is next—we are tethered to God's inescapable goodness. And it is there, guiding us, even when life is Anything *But* Good.

And this is why we need to ground ourselves in the theological foundation of God's goodness as a first step in cultivating the fruit of Goodness in our lives. Because life is hard. And the stuff that happens to us in life is not always good. Bad stuff happens. But bad stuff—bad diagnoses, bad luck, even bad behaviors and bad decisions—those things cannot separate us from the through line of God's goodness.

This is not to invalidate all the difficult experiences we live through day in and day out, but simply to remind us all that whatever we tend to, grows. How are we cultivating the Fruit of Goodness as a Through Line in our lives? How are we living this promise of God as if it is true in the present?

We are well-practiced at looking for, naming, and celebrating the Through Line of Goodness in people's lives after they die. Today we have seven powerful examples of how to find and celebrate the Through Line of goodness in these Saints' lives. Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber reminds us that this Sunday is called ALL Saints' Day and not just SOME Saints' Day. She writes, *"In the Lutheran tradition saints aren't a special category of people who happen to be the opposite of sinners...saints are just regular sinners who happen to be forgiven. That's all of us, by the way...[Even as we grieve, we see that] the shortcomings of our lives that seem so glaring when we're alive fade when we see how the [goodness of God's] story works out..."*³

³ Nadia Bolz Weber, "It's All Saints, not Some Saints a message on complicated grief and the afterlife," *The Corners* (1 November 2022), accessed on November 2,

2025 at <https://thecorners.substack.com/p/its-all-saints-not-some-saints>.

Celebrating the Through Line of Goodness in someone's life is not about sugar coating their life to be something it wasn't.

Celebrating the Through Line of Goodness in the lives of Ordinary Saints' is seeing how the *imago dei* (image of God) was uniquely reflected in their life in a way that has never been before and will never be again.

And in our remembering, we keep the Through Line of Goodness from their lives alive as a way to stay connected to God's *continued* goodness in OUR lives.

I see the Through Line of Goodness in Michael Hoffmeyer's Life in

how he loved being in nature (a love that his grandparents instilled in him as a child)—skateboarding, fishing and camping (often with Alyssa and Alex), enjoying the fresh air of outdoor concerts at Fiddlers Green and Red Rocks, shooting off fireworks into the night sky on the 4th of July, being fascinated by insects and loving animals, and even professionally at his job at Smitty's Sprinklers. He would often lay down on the grass and listen to the ground to find out where the roots were pinching a sprinkler line. Even as he struggled with his own

addictions and difficulties, he loved the challenge of figuring out what was wrong for someone else and making their day by fixing it! **The Through Line of Michael's Goodness forever tethers us to God's Goodness.**

I see the Through Line of Goodness in Terri Dunn's Life

in how she lived life in abundance and with exuberance and endless energy—forever inviting people into her adventures, and connecting people to one another and the vitality and joy of life. Whether organizing hikes with friends, marveling at the miracle of the human body, taking initiative to bring people together over meals, travel, or book clubs, gently pushing people out of their comfort zones, or showing up for each of her four kids in all of their activities, cheering them on as they discovered *their own* goodness and greatness—Terri gave 110% PLUS to her life. And she gave that same energy, investment and intention to fighting cancer and ultimately to her dying and her death too. Holding Hope in one hand and Realism in the other, creating her own "Terri Way" for the end of life—which yes, looked like walking 2 miles a day with family and friends even up until

the very end. **The Through Line of Terri's Goodness forever tethers us to God's Goodness.**

I see the Through Line of Goodness in Phyllis Bennett's Life in how her love of beautiful music and beautiful things connected us to God's beauty. From hosting people in her home—often with a private organ concert by a musician of her choosing on her home organ!—to financially supporting the beauty of this sacred space and amazing pipe organ, to wearing beautiful clothing (with a sparkle!) and always having her hair and makeup just right, to showing off the beauty and accomplishments of her children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and great great grandchildren—Phyllis brightened a room with her grace, faith, glamour, and opinions. **The Through Line of Phyllis' Goodness forever tethers us to God's Goodness.**

I see the Through Line of Goodness in Bill Marshall's Life in how his humility and heart of service endeared so many people to trust him because of his tender, loving care. From calling dental patients in the evening after a

procedure to check on them, to stopping to thank someone in uniform for their service, to delivering leftovers from Panera and Atlanta Bread to DIA three times a week for soldiers and their families at the USO, to transporting veterans to their medical appointments, to helping friends and family with handyman projects, and flying people through the mountains to see “God's country” (which is what he called Colorado), to being present with love to his family—Bill was the definition of humility with a side of humor. **The Through Line of Bill's Goodness forever tethers us to God's Goodness.**

I see the Through Line of Goodness in Gary Kieft's Life in how he truly believed Jesus' teachings to love our neighbor as ourselves and that if we saw someone who is thirsty, we outta give them drink, someone who needs shelter, we outta give them a place to stay (or take them to our parents' house to stay!), or if someone needs a listening ear, we outta listen. Whether helping people fix their cars as a mechanic, or taking people out sailing where they could experience the feeling of the free open spirit of the seas, or sitting at the piano playing through the hymnal to uplift his

own spirit, Gary had a tender heart, an idealist spirit, and a bit of rebellious streak. His eccentricities and struggles were not without great difficulty, yet he faithfully sought to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. **The Through Line of Gary's Goodness forever tethers us to God's Goodness.**

I see the Through Line of Goodness in Sharon Murphy's Life in her meticulous attention to detail, policies, protocols, bylaws, Roberts Rules of Order, Minute Taking, and all things related to estate planning—wills, trusts, and probate administration. Nicknamed “the General” by her younger siblings, Sharon kept everything in order and it's no surprise she was co-valedictorian in high school and years later was co-moderator of this church. For Sharon, following the 'rules' and ensuring others did the same was not about power, it was about fairness. She even held herself accountable to be fair, often talking to herself in the third person, “*Oh Sharon, now that isn't right,*” or “*Wait Sharon, let's think about this differently.*” She cared about “doing the right thing” and ensuring things were done in the “right way.” **The Through Line**

of Sharon's Goodness forever tethers us to God's Goodness.

I see the Through Line of Goodness in Drema Doolittle's Life in her creativity, artistry, style, and inclusivity. From the artwork she curated in her home, to the people she curated around her table; from her unique style of funky flair with her hats, jackets, and coats, to the artistic elegance of her calligraphy; from her trip to see *The Eagles* in Las Vegas with Denise Wylde at age 72 to all those days spent closer to home cheering her grandkids on at their events; from her love of word games to her constant thirst for learning about history and theology; to her commitment to inclusivity and social justice—Drema was truly a Bright Light in our world. She had a way of treasuring her gospel, southern roots, while also openly critiquing them. There's a lot more “both/and” in life than “either/or” and Drema knew this. **The Through Line of Drema's Goodness forever tethers us to God's Goodness.**

But I see all the lit candles on the side of the sanctuary today too. You have your own saints you are remembering today, and I know you can name the Through Line of Goodness in

their lives that indeed, forever,
tethers you to God's Goodness.

Rev. Nadia Bolz Weber finished her reflection on All Saints' Day saying, *"I am no expert in the afterlife, but all I know is that when we die, we somehow return to our divine source. And because God is love, the love we shared here on Earth is the connective tissue that unites us eternally with everyone who loved us. In some inexplicable way, we are all—every single one of us—held together in the heart of God...And after we die we get to be the ancestors of the generations to follow."*⁴

Might we also then, remember on this day, that we are Saints in the making? We are the ancestors of the generations to follow!

It is good to remember that we will all die one day, *"from dust we were created and to dust we shall return"*—but we remember this not to Dwell on Death, but to Deepen our Experience of Life.

Bill Marshall said that when he was teaching his kids to drive, he taught them how to drive backwards, because *"if you can*

drive backwards, then you can drive forwards!"

On All Saints' Day we look backwards to the lives of these saints and celebrate their Goodness in order to drive forward ourselves with more clarity and intention and inspiration in our lives...to continue God's Through Line of Goodness and realize that one day in the future WE will be the *lasting* Through Line of Goodness for others. Our legacy is not defined by how we die; our legacy is defined by how we live.

Which leads us to this community of faith Calvary, and our stewardship emphasis of supporting the mission and ministry of this church in 2026 and beyond. Our stewardship campaign is called *For Goodness' Sake*.

As we look toward making financial commitments for the coming year, may we remember that everything good that we experience at Calvary begins with our Goodness from God! And all the Goodness that we do as a church in the world is because of the Goodness—beneficence and generosity and

⁴ Bolz-Weber, *ibid*.

working for the well-being of all, the stewardship—of each and every one of us. The generosity and goodness of countless Calvary saints has brought us to where we are today. Where will we lead our church—and our world—tomorrow?

Now, more than ever, Calvary's voice, presence, and action as a loving, inclusive, welcoming the stranger, healing the sick, lifting up the vulnerable, Jesus-following Community of Faith is desperately needed. The Goodness of God—which calls us all to Practice the Fruit of Goodness/Generosity/Ensuring the Well-being of All—is so often missing in our religious and political zeitgeist, policies, and leadership. There is lots of talk of a punitive, exclusive, nationalistic God....but not a lot of talk (or “walk!”) these days of the peaceful, loving Jesus that God sent to earth to teach us all how love.

What will change that? The Through Line of Calvary's Goodness at work in the world.

What supports the Through Line of Calvary's Goodness at work

in the world? Your financial gifts. My financial gifts. Our collective generosity For Goodness' Sake.

Potawatomi author Kaitlin Curtice looks at pictures of herself and considers her future role as an ancestor, writing,

“I realized then that one day I am going to be an ancestor. When I have passed on and my spirit is left to lead my children and their children, they will talk about me, about my legacy, about what I left undone or what I did to change things...So, I remember my ancestors. I remember what they have left for me, and I remember what was left undone. I look at their pictures, searching their eyes for stories they may never have told us when they were alive. ...they visit us in dreams, reconnecting us, helping us imagine a new way forward, a way of peace. One day we will become ancestors, but until then, we whisper to our long-gone ones, asking that they remember us.”⁵

She captures this in her poetry:

Passed On One,
I see you there.

⁵ Kaitlin B. Curtice, *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God* (Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2020), 88–90.

Not your skin and bones,
nor the frame that once held
you.
I see your aura,
your spirit,
your essence.

I see the glow of who you once
were
and who you are today.
I see, somehow,
the imprint of what you've left
me here.

It's not a thumbprint, but some
other form
of spirit-code.
Somehow, the shape of you
carves lines into the essence of
who I am.
Somehow, I am enough
because you were
enough.

Ancestor, your name will
always be
the sound of breath in my
lungs.

Ancestor, your face will always
look
like the face of my own
children.

Ancestor, your essence
will always feel like
the wind
when it slips
through the tree branches,
singing a song.

You, Dear One, lead me, still.

I feel the gifts you've left me
and I wonder how much more
is waiting.

I learn my own way as I
reckon with your mistakes
and realize that you were human
once,
like I am human now.

I wonder how much you notice
from the other side.

What does God feel like?

I'll wait,
and one day,
you'll show me.⁶

And each day *we will show*
future generations what God
feels like *to us* now....and how
God's Goodness is leading us
all, even still.

As the Through Line of God's
Goodness in our Saints has led
us through the past to the
present— may the Through Line
of God's Goodness as
experienced and lived in us
today, lead our church (and the
Goodness of the news we
proclaim to the world) into the
future...*For Goodness' Sake.*

Amen.

⁶ Curtice, *ibid.*