

"**G**OD IS GOOD," the leader at the Banff '95 Youth Weekend in Banff, Alberta, Canada shouted from the podium.

"All the time," the young people roared back.

After the retreat, two Saskatchewan-bound buses carried some of the youth back to their homes. It was dark and raining when the buses stopped across the street from a restaurant in Hanna, Alberta. After supper, a group of teens walked back to the bus.

Goodness in Tragedy

They saw the headlights of an oncoming car but thought it was far away. Seconds later, the car crashed into the middle of the group. Brakes squealed. Screams split the air. Three bodies thudded to the ground. Amanda Derksen, an 11th grade student from Waldheim, Saskatchewan was killed instantly. Two other girls sustained injuries.

Young people from many churches attended Amanda's memorial service.

They stood in huddles of silent grief. Subdued weeping punctuated the songs, the eulogy, and the sermon. Then the youth leader rose and slowly walked to the podium. A few short days ago, in a very different setting, he'd led a group of eager youths in a glorious chant: "God is good!" "God is good!" "God is good." Tragedy had struck, but had God changed? Was he still good in this setting? His eyes blurred as he looked across the audience of somber faces. Taking a deep breath, he said, "God is good." Something happened in the audience: a stir like people shifting in their seats, tear-stained faces looking up expectantly. "God is good," the youth leader repeated, his voice gaining strength.

"All the time," the youth mumbled

through their tears.

How do we know God is good when our lives feel bad? When circumstances threaten to crush us and prayers remain unanswered, where is God? Is he lovingly involved in our lives even then? In pondering these questions, I've learned to ask another question. Could it be that our measure of God's goodness is incomplete?

We've been conditioned to think of God as a doting parent who shields us from unpleasant circumstances. We've learned to equate the goodness of God with the rightness of our circumstances. We're like the little girl who, when she got what she wanted, exclaimed, "God must really like me!" Or conversely, when things weren't going her way, pouted, "Why is God punishing me like this?"

Goodness in Adversity

David knew God's goodness is based on his mercy and love, qualities that never change. David understood adversity. Maligned by friends and family, hunted by King Saul, hiding in caves and fearing for his life, David poured out his anguish to God. Then he made an astonishing declaration:

"Remember, O Lord your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. . . . according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD. Good and upright is the LORD" (Psalm 25:6-8). Throughout his life, David proclaimed the goodness of God in the Psalms he wrote.

"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever" (Psalm 107:1).

"You are good, and what you do is good" (Psalm 119:68).

"The LORD is good to all: he has compassion on all he has made" (Psalm 145:9).

Our circumstances are not an accurate reflection of God's goodness.

God's goodness is based on his mercy and love, qualities that never change.

A l l t h e T i m e

By Helen Grace Lescheid

Whether life is good or bad, God's goodness, rooted in his character, is the same. Knowing this, David could sing about the goodness of God whether he was peacefully tending his father's sheep or fearfully running from his enemies. "All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful" (Psalm 25:10), he stated. "Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him" (Psalm 34:8).

Jeremiah tells us that God does not delight in our misery. "Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men" (Lamentations 3:32, 33).

God's goodness is rooted in his unchanging character. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). God's goodness is the same on bad days and good days.

People who attest to God's goodness in their lives do not have absence of trouble, but rather a keen awareness of God's presence in every situation. Some of my patients at a senior care home have shown me how this works in daily life. Let me tell you about one couple.

Goodness in Sorrow

While distributing morning medications, I'd find this elderly couple enjoying their early morning coffee. The small woman had risen early to perk coffee exactly the way her husband liked it. Then, in grand style, she'd poured it into Royal Albert china cups. As I entered, her husband, a tall gentleman with regal bearing, would greet me. We'd chat a bit and often he would end his conversation with the words, "God is good."

One day he told me a story I will

never forget. "We lived in Siberia during the Russian Revolution," he said. "One cold winter night gypsies entered our home. We gave them food and lodging. The following day they left.

"We did our best to scour our home but it was too late. The gypsies had brought small pox into our home. One of our children became ill and died. Because the ground was frozen several meters deep, we buried our little son in a snow bank awaiting spring when we could give him a proper burial. A second son also died, followed by the death of our beautiful daughter. In the spring we dug three little graves side by side. It was a very sad time for us."

I stood transfixed. I couldn't imagine

God is good even when life is not.

such sorrow. But this wasn't the end of their hardships. In two

more years they buried two more children. Moreover, under the communist regime, life had become unbearable for this family. Seeking religious freedom, they left their home with just a few belongings and traveled to Moscow. Eventually they immigrated to Canada to start a new life. "We were among the lucky ones who got out," he said. "God has been good to us."

Goodness All the Time

They buried five children. They lost their home and country and almost all their possessions. They struggled diligently to get ahead in a foreign country. Yet I detected no bitterness. No rancor. Just a deep conviction that God is good even when life is not.

Faith in God's goodness is not destroyed by hardships. On the contrary, life's storms create an opportunity to sink our roots deeper into God's character. When we do, we'll discover to our glad surprise that God is good all the time. ■

Helen Grace Lescheid is a freelance writer in Sumas, Washington.