

## What Leaders Are Saying about *Good or God?*

“*Good or God?* is a powerful journey through Scripture that will challenge and transform your perspective on what it means to live the good life.”

—MARK BATTERSON, *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Circle Maker*

“*Good or God?* is an amazing lesson in discernment that will challenge you to truly seek the Lord for His perfect will in your life.”

—JOYCE MEYER, Bible teacher and best-selling author

“John Bevere is a respected teacher, leader, and author, and beyond all of that he is a good friend and fellow kingdom builder. His desire to see each person live not just a good life but a God life will increase your faith and challenge you to walk boldly into all that Jesus has for you. John’s teaching and personal revelations will give you new insight into the will of God and His very best plans for your future.”

—BRIAN HOUSTON, senior pastor of Hillsong Church

“When I read the stories of people who did unprecedented things out of love for God, I find myself longing to be among them. *Good or God?* speaks to what happens in the minds and hearts of those who truly embrace God’s best—rather than settling for easier counterfeits. If you share this desire to know and serve God in a radical way, I urge you to read this book.”

—JOHN C. MAXWELL, best-selling author and speaker

“John Bevere’s book *Good or God?* will challenge you to never settle for less than God’s best. John does a brilliant job of reminding us that we will find God when we look for Him.”

—JENTEZEN FRANKLIN, senior pastor of Free Chapel and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Fasting*

“*Good or God?* will shake you to your core. If you want to stick to business as usual, this isn’t the book for you. But if you want your perspective to be forever altered, devour this message. It will transform your life!”

—CHRISTINE CAINE, founder of The A21 Campaign and best-selling author of *Unstoppable*

“Challenging. Clear. Needed. *Good or God?* is an essential reminder that being good is not the goal. This book highlights the potential for people to move from the mundane life of moral obedience into an exhilarating life that comes from Jesus alone.”

—LOUIE GIGLIO, pastor of Passion City Church, Atlanta, Georgia,  
and founder of Passion Conferences

“Like a struck match shattering the utter darkness, John Bevere illumines the path toward the manifest presence of God while kindling an insatiable desire on the part of the reader that is satisfied only in intimate relationship with Him.”

—BISHOP T. D. JAKES, CEO of TDJ Enterprises and *New York Times*  
best-selling author

“The goodness of God is all around us, but do we truly understand it? In *Good or God?*, John Bevere examines what it means to be good and what God has to do with it. As you read through this important book, you will be intrigued, challenged, and motivated to seek God’s best for yourself and to share it with others.”

—CRAIG GROESCHEL, senior pastor of LifeChurch.tv and author of *From This Day Forward* and *Five Commitments to Fail-Proof Your Marriage*

“Once again, John Bevere has delivered an incredible, life-changing call to action for the body of Christ. In his new book *Good or God?*, he shows the reader how they can get the most out of their relationship with God and set a higher standard for all areas of their life.”

—MATTHEW BARNETT, senior pastor of Angelus Temple, Los Angeles,  
California, and cofounder of the Dream Center

“In *Good or God?*, John Bevere challenges us to rethink our understanding of God’s goodness and to recognize areas where we’ve settled for our own standards instead of His. With keen biblical insight and vulnerable moments from his own experience, John inspires readers to refuse the counterfeit goodness the world offers and to re-surrender their hearts to the perfect holiness of our heavenly Father. *Good or God?* is a must-read for every follower of Jesus who refuses to settle for less than God’s best.”

—CHRIS HODGES, senior pastor of Church of the Highlands and  
author of *Fresh Air* and *Four Cups*

JOHN BEVERE

GOOD  
*OR*  
GOD?

WHY GOOD WITHOUT GOD ISN'T ENOUGH

GOOD OR GOD?

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*I dedicate this book to our son...*

*Arden Christopher Bevere*

*You are diligent, strong, tender, and wise. I am amazed  
by your sensitivity to those who are hurting.  
Son, I'm so proud of you and love you forever.*

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# INTRODUCTION

Recently I was on the phone with a well-respected national leader. We were saying our goodbyes when he unexpectedly said, “John, wait just a minute. I need to say something to you. You’ve written numerous books in the past twenty years, but there is now one you *have* to write. It is a timely and prophetic message to the church; it’s heaven’s mandate for you.”

By the time he was finished speaking, I was on my knees in awe of the presence of God. Within weeks of the phone call, an overwhelming passion to write this book emerged within me.

This message centers on one simple question: is good enough?

In these times the terms *good* and *God* are seemingly synonymous. We believe that what is generally accepted as good must be aligned with God’s will. Generosity, humility, and justice are good. Selfishness, arrogance, and cruelty are evil. The distinction seems pretty straightforward. But is that all there is to it? If *good* is so obvious, why does Hebrews 5:14 teach that we must have discernment to recognize it?

The apostle Paul writes, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that *good* and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). We cannot discern what is truly good for our lives without first having our minds renewed. Without the transformation that comes through the renewing of our minds, we miss out on the amazing, God-infused life available to us in Christ.

Before the foundation of the world, God designed a plan for your life, one that is overflowing with fulfilled purpose, immense joy, and great

satisfaction. His will and plan for you are perfectly and completely good. But there is a counterfeit good that can keep you from embracing God's best.

Sadly, many of us have settled for the knockoff. We've unknowingly (and at times knowingly) rejected *God* in pursuit of what's apparently *good*.

The early church leaders repeatedly warned us about this deception (to be deceived is to believe we're aligned with truth, when in actuality we're not). Jesus Himself warned that deception would be so cleverly concealed in our time even the elect could fall prey to it. Can we treat these warnings lightly? Can we brush them off, assuming we are above deception and can instinctively discern good from evil?

The good news is that God is not trying to hide His best from us. He's not in the business of pulling the shades over our eyes. He promises that those who seek will find. If we commit to the journey of seeking truth, we will not be duped by its counterfeit. The question is, will we look to the Source of truth, or will we settle for a superficial knowledge of God and His good will? My hope is that in reading this book, you will solidify your resolve never to settle for less than God's best.

Let's pray before we begin:

*Father, in Jesus's name, open my eyes, ears, and heart to see, hear, and perceive Your will for my life. Holy Spirit, teach me, deeply and profoundly, the ways of Jesus Christ as I read this message. I look to You as my Teacher. May You speak to me from every sentence of this book. May my life be forever changed. Amen.*

# WHAT IS GOOD?

“No one is good but One, that is, God.”

—MARK 10:18

Everything in the universe is good to the degree it conforms to the nature of God and evil as it fails to do so.

—A.W. TOZER

**G**ood and evil. We all know the difference, right? Aren't we born into this world with an inherent knowledge of what is right and wrong?

I've often heard people say that human beings are inherently good. Is that true? We know that the movies, documentaries, and other programs that warm our hearts are those highlighting the goodness of humankind. I don't know of any story, novel, or movie that's gained massive popularity in which evil triumphs over good.

We all grew up watching the good guys go through tough challenges. The odds were stacked against them and they faced inevitable defeat, often right up to the very end, but suddenly our heroes broke through to victory or justice. We anticipated and applauded these finales. We expected good to always win out because, after all, God is on the side of good, right?

In recent years producers and networks initiated a trend when they introduced reality television shows featuring makeovers. It began with shows about fixing up a struggling family's home. We sat glued to our televisions,

admiring the excitement and generosity of philanthropists in their outreach to the poor and needy. We anticipated the shock of those who benefitted, then teared up in that climactic moment when the poor souls beheld their refurbished house. Then came another show that helped “losers” struggling with obesity lose large amounts of weight, while still other programs helped with dress, hair, make-up, and more.

Soon afterward celebrities joined the trend. Recognized artists made a way for those who otherwise would have had no opportunity to showcase their voices or dancing skills. We cheered as we witnessed the unknown candidate given the chance to become a sensational star overnight. What kindness, what generosity, what goodwill!

Any program about highlighting benevolence, protecting the innocent, or sacrificing time to help the underdog grew in popularity. Included in our list of reality viewing were shows about police or bounty hunters apprehending evil criminals. These too became some of the most-watched programs.

To sum it all up, our entertainment is often centered on the good of humanity.

Sales and Marketing 101 teaches us that a product must feel, look, sound, taste, or smell good in order to succeed in the marketplace. It must elevate the consumer’s senses or emotions to a better and happier state. We know that good items will sell. After all, who would want to purchase something bad? And only twisted people would desire to procure evil.

We hear comments such as “he’s a good man” or “she’s a good woman,” and we normally accept this evaluation at face value. The vulnerable quickly let down their guard and embrace every statement or action from those proclaimed to be *good* as safe and trustworthy. But are these assessments always accurate?

Could we ever fall into the delusional state of calling what’s right *wrong* or what’s wrong *right*? Doesn’t everybody know the difference? And we certainly could never fall into the deceived state of calling good *evil* or evil *good*. Correct?

Consider this. Many centuries ago, a wealthy young leader approached

Jesus Christ. He was an honest and morally pure man. He'd never committed adultery, murdered, lied, stolen, or cheated someone in a business deal. He had always respected his parents. He was a model citizen and was most likely admired by many. He honored Jesus with the greeting of "Good Teacher."

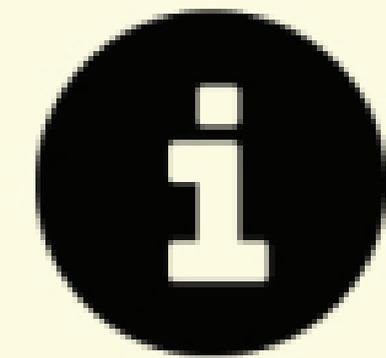
This was a leader speaking to another leader; one good man appealing to another good man. He sought common ground with the notable Teacher he'd never personally met. Perhaps he reasoned within himself, *If I cajole the heart of this Prophet by appealing to His goodness, I'll convince Him to give a favorable response to my inquiry.* However, before Jesus acknowledged his question, He first countered, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God" (Mark 10:18).

Why would Jesus correct a man who called Him good? Was Jesus not good? Of course He was! So why did He say this? Could it have been that "good" was the wrong standard of judgment? In other words, is it possible that man's standard of what is good is different from God's standard?

If you or I were to put ourselves in this man's shoes, how would we have fared if we had greeted Jesus as "good Teacher"? I can answer for myself. After being a child of God for years, reading through my Bible more than once, studying Scripture for hours, praying daily, and even being in full-time ministry and authoring a few best-selling Christian books, I would have received the same response as the wealthy young leader. Jesus would have said, "John, why do you call Me good?" in exactly the same manner. How do I know this? The Spirit of God has dealt with me similarly to the way Jesus did with this ruler.

### Shocking News

Let me explain. In the late 1990s, I flew to Sweden for a conference. It was an overnight flight that landed in Stockholm early in the morning. After landing, grabbing my bags, and clearing customs, I was met and warmly greeted by my Swedish host. Before we exited the terminal, he informed me of what would become the news story of the year and quite possibly the decade.



Pages 6-8 are not included in this book preview.

God proceeded to speak to my heart. He showed me how most “good” people, and especially Christian people, are not drawn to lewd sexual orgies, dark music with blatantly rebellious lyrics, rock stars who flaunt Satanism in their concerts, mass murder, grand larceny, or any such blatantly evil behavior. Most are deceived by and drawn to behavior and things that seem right, good, and wise but are contrary to His wisdom. We are told:

There is a way that *seems right* to a man, but its end is the way of death.  
(Proverbs 14:12)

Let’s first discuss the latter part of this verse: “but its end is the *way of death*.” Many Christians don’t pay close attention to these words because they think, *I’m saved, headed for heaven, and will not see death*. In their minds, the statement only applies to nonbelievers. However, let’s rethink what God’s Word is saying here.

Look at the words “the way of death.” Scripture speaks with some frequency of the way of life and the way of death. God declares to His own (not to those who don’t belong to Him), “Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I set before you the *way of life* and the *way of death*’” (Jeremiah 21:8).

*Way* here means the wisdom we live by. You’ll see this word often throughout Scripture. Jesus frames it as follows: “The *way* is broad that leads to destruction [death], and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the *way* is narrow that leads to life...” (Matthew 7:13–14 NASB). But is Jesus only addressing eternity here?

God placed the tree of life in the center of the Garden of Eden. It represented God’s way of life, His wisdom. The other central tree in the garden was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This tree represented the way of death; it stood for man’s wisdom apart from God. Partaking of its fruit didn’t just impact Adam and Eve in the afterlife; it affected them immediately. Before their foolish act, they had been unrestrained, productive, healthy, and successful at whatever they set their hearts to do. But once they partook of the forbidden tree, life became hard. They were plagued with

sickness, lack, stressful toil, and difficulties they'd never known. They had entered into the way of death.

However, God is a Redeemer. He'd already planned to recover what man had lost. He made a covenant in order to restore the *way of life*. His wisdom would once again produce true happiness, pleasant living, peace, abundance, and other great benefits:

Happy is the man who finds wisdom...all the things you desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a *tree of life* to those who take hold of her, and happy are those who retain her. (Proverbs 3:13–18)

Scripture shows that God's wisdom applied to our lives results in fruitful living, productivity, success, a long life, peace of mind, and honor. A tree is something others partake of. According to this scripture, if we follow the way of life (wisdom), we become a tree of life—a source of nourishment to those who partake of what we produce. The converse is also true. If we live by the wisdom of man, we become a detrimental tree, and those who partake of what we produce will gravitate toward toil, stress, unproductivity, sickness, selfishness, and the other byproducts of spiritual death.

Returning to Proverbs 14:12, we read, “There is a way that *seems right* to a man, but its end is the way of death.” When we examine the first part of this verse, we know it can easily apply to anyone, Christian and nonbeliever alike. There is a way that seems right—it seems good, wise, beneficial, strategic, acceptable, profitable, and so forth. Yet the warning is clear: what seems good may actually be detrimental, harmful, and nonproductive—the way of death.

The author of Hebrews writes this sobering exhortation to believers:

...We have much to say...since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to

teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. . . . But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their *senses exercised to discern both good and evil*. (Hebrews 5:11–12, 14)

It's clear that discernment is a key factor in determining what is truly good and what is truly evil. In other words, what's truly good is not always clear to our natural thinking, reasoning, or senses.

You may ask, "Didn't the author of Hebrews say that our senses can be trained to tell the difference?" He did, but what senses was he referring to? You'll notice that at the beginning of these verses, the author said he was writing to these Christians whose hearing had grown dull. What hearing was he referring to? Did all of these Hebrew believers need hearing aids? Hardly. He was referencing the ability to hear in our hearts. Jesus constantly taught, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matthew 11:15). Virtually all those who received this teaching had physical ears, yet not all of them had a discerning heart to hear the Word of God, which was best for their lives.

We will delve deeper into spiritual discernment a bit later in this book; however, the important point at this juncture is that good and evil cannot always be differentiated on the surface level. Before my encounter with truth in that hotel room in Stockholm, I believed good and bad were right before us, plain and evident. Yet consider another example: One of Jesus's main team members, Peter, spoke of protection and long life to Jesus. It seemed certain that he was giving his Boss good counsel. Yet Jesus reprimanded him sharply by stating his interests were clearly not God's (see Matthew 16:21–23). This is only one of many scriptural examples I could give illustrating how good and evil are not openly evident.

Solomon prayed, "Give me an understanding heart so that I can . . . know the difference between right and wrong" (1 Kings 3:9 NLT). It takes an enlightened heart, one that is trained, to identify what God calls *good* and *evil*. Eve was perfect in every way, and in the garden where she resided the presence of God was powerful and strong. However, what she discerned to

be good, pleasant, and profitable was actually evil and detrimental for her life. She was deceived and suffered because of it.

This brings us to the purpose of this book: to illuminate, through the Scriptures and the help of the Holy Spirit, the difference between what is good for your life and what will ultimately be detrimental. If Eve, who was perfect and living in a flawless environment, could still be deceived, how much easier is it for those of us with imperfect minds and living in a corrupted world—a skewed society—to be deceived into judging what is damaging to be good?

## HOW'D IT HAPPEN?

So don't be misled, my dear  
brothers and sisters. Whatever is  
good and perfect is a gift coming  
down to us from God our Father...

—JAMES 1:16-17 NLT

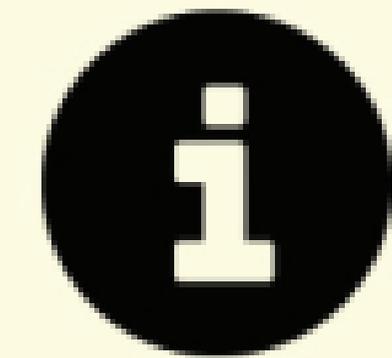
[The Christian] does not think God will  
love us because we are good, but that God  
will make us good because He loves us...

—C.S. LEWIS

**T**hat day in Sweden, I sat in my hotel room stunned, my emotions raging. I was in awe of the divine response to my grief over the celebrity's death, yet I was troubled. I was perplexed and full of questions. I had been in ministry for years, had written books, and had taught believers on every continent (except Antarctica), yet my ignorance regarding what is truly good had just been exposed.

The predominant questions surging through my mind were, *What else have I viewed as good that's not good in God's eyes?* and, equally important, *What have been the consequences?*

Before I begin addressing these questions, it would be beneficial to go back again to where it all began: the Garden of Eden. This is a logical step, for this is the reference the Spirit of God had used to grab my attention in



Pages 14-16 are not included in this book preview.

Before Eve was taken from Adam, God had given a clear directive: “You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad. You must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day” (Genesis 2:16–17 TEV).

We don’t know the timing of the next recorded event. It could have been after a few weeks, years, decades, or even longer. But the day came when the most cunning beast, the serpent, targeted Eve and questioned God’s command.

(How could a snake talk? I personally believe animals could communicate to humans before the Fall. This is why we don’t see Eve alarmed or taken aback when the snake approached her. This knowledge about animals speaking must have been passed down through the generations, because when Balaam’s donkey spoke, it didn’t shock Balaam either; see Numbers 22:21–35. He just carried on a conversation with his beast of burden, not showing any surprise or that he was caught off-guard.)

### How Did He Do It?

Let me restate the purpose of our investigation into what happened in Eden. We are seeking to know how this devil-possessed serpent could get Eve to turn on God in a perfect environment. Let’s examine his approach:

He said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1)

With this inquiry the serpent initiated the first step of his strategy. His objective was to sway Eve from godly wisdom. His cleverly crafted question enticed the woman to momentarily lose sight of the myriad available fruit trees and redirect her focus to the single one withheld.

God’s exact words to Adam and Eve had been, “You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except...” His generosity emphasized, “You may eat from any tree.” There are thousands of known fruit trees in the world,

and my guess is that every one was represented in the garden. How clever was this serpent? Eve could have eaten from thousands of trees, but after Satan's twisted question, she could not get her eyes off the only one that was forbidden.

It's no different today. God has freely given each of us so many gifts—every blessing heaven offers (see Ephesians 1:3). It would take another book just to list them! We are also told that all things are ours in Christ Jesus (see 1 Corinthians 3:21–23). However, what's our enemy's strategy? It's no different than it was in the garden. He seeks to cover up God's generosity so we only see what is “withheld.” Why does God restrain us from anything? We'll look into this important question in a few pages, but to put it simply, it's for our own good. He knows better than we do what's best for us.

Siding with the truth that she knew, Eve quickly responded to this talking snake:

“We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, *nor shall you touch it*, lest you die.’” (Genesis 3:2–3)

It is interesting to note the inaccuracy of Eve's reply. God never said anything about not touching the fruit of the tree. This may seem insignificant, but it gives us a clue as to why the serpent targeted her and not Adam.

Eve was not yet on the scene when the original command was given, so she hadn't heard it from the mouth of God as Adam had. I personally believe there was a previous day when she and Adam had been walking through this vast garden and came upon the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam pointed it out and told Eve what God had said about this particular tree. I refer to this kind of interaction as *communicated* knowledge. On the other hand, for Adam the command had been *revealed* knowledge. What's the difference? Revealed knowledge is when God shows us something directly.

## Revealed versus Communicated Knowledge

One day Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (Matthew 16:13). One by one, the disciples listed all they had heard from others: a resurrected John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets—those were some of the reports these men had heard through their day’s version of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and blogs.

Once Jesus got past what they’d discovered through communicated knowledge, He then questioned, “But who do you say that I am?” (verse 15)

The disciples stood paralyzed with no response. Had Jesus not asked the first question, they likely would have been influenced by others’ comments, and their responses would have reflected communicated knowledge. But with His two questions, Jesus’s motive was to strip away this secondhand knowledge in order to find out what God had revealed to them. Peter was the only one with an answer. He blurted out, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (verse 16).

I can imagine that Jesus smiled, put His hand on Peter’s back to affirm him, and announced, “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (verse 17). Peter wasn’t mimicking information from what he’d read online or seen randomly in someone’s magazine article! He was sharing truth God had imparted directly to him.

Jesus then declared that this type of *revelation knowledge* is what the church would be built on and that hell’s forces could not stop those who possessed it. On the contrary, hell’s forces can more easily deceive those who only possess *communicated knowledge*.

We attain revealed knowledge in many ways. It can occur as we are reading Scripture or an inspired book, quieting ourselves in prayer, listening to our pastor speak, receiving a vision as Peter did on a rooftop (see Acts 10:9–16), or simply encountering the Word of God revealed to our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It’s hard to generalize how it occurs. Sometimes you may hear a still, small voice deep in your heart. Other times you simply *know* because

the revelation was dropped into your spirit. Other times your heart begins to race and you sense the presence of God as you read Scripture. However it comes, the bottom line is that you know you've heard from God, and this *revealed* knowledge cannot be taken from you.

On the other hand, *communicated* knowledge comes by merely hearing or reading someone else's statements about what they've heard from God. The knowledge may be accurate, but if the Spirit doesn't reveal it to your heart, it can be easily distorted.

For example, I've heard some people boldly flaunt their knowledge of the Bible: "You know, John, money is the root of all evil." What these misguided friends have read—or have heard a minister quote—is 1 Timothy 6:10, which says, "For the *love* of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (NLT).

Money is merely a tool. That's it. You can misuse a tool, or you can use it correctly. A gun is a tool. In a thief's hand a gun will be misused in a robbery. However, a gun in a policeman's hand can be used to stop someone from raping or murdering a woman. It's the same gun, and there's nothing inherently evil or good about it. In the same way, money is a tool, and it is not the root of all evil. The *love of money* is the root of every kind of evil.

Individuals who make erroneous comments like this possess communicated knowledge rather than revealed knowledge. In my experience this communicated knowledge is sometimes more dangerous than the absence of knowledge.

The words Eve used to describe the command to not touch the fruit of the tree indicate that she possessed merely communicated knowledge. God's presence was in the garden. He walked with Adam and Eve, most likely on a daily basis (see Genesis 3:8). It's perfectly fine that Adam shared with his wife what God had commanded, but what she likely didn't do was seek her Creator directly about what was spoken.

It should be a characteristic of those who seek God to dig more deeply into knowing and understanding Him. Hear what the people of Berea did when Paul brought them his message from heaven:

And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth. (Acts 17:11 NLT)

The Bereans were in the game! They listened to Paul intently, then searched the Scriptures themselves. I love the word *open-minded*. Their minds were open to the voice of the Spirit. The channels between their spirits and minds were clear, open to receive revelation knowledge.

Unlike too many believers today, these Bereans didn't get all their content simply off podcasts, blog posts, or discussions on Twitter or Facebook. Likewise, when Jesus discussed His identity with the disciples, He wasn't interested in what people were saying on the social media of His day. He wanted to know, "Guys, what has God revealed to you?"

It might have been on one of their journeys as a group that Peter heard someone say, "Jesus must be the Christ." At that moment, awareness exploded in his mind and heart, spurred by the presence of the Holy Spirit. *That's it! He is the Son of God. He is the Christ. Wow! Until now I just couldn't put my finger on it, but now I know He's the Christ!* This is often how we experience God revealing His truth to our hearts.

Or maybe it happened differently with Peter. The revelation may have come to his heart one night as he was drifting off to sleep, or in the daytime while he was walking between towns, or in a moment when he was watching Jesus speak to other team members at a campsite. Perhaps in one of those moments, without Peter realizing it, God reminded him of one of the Old Testament scriptures, like Isaiah 9:6–7, that foretold the Christ's coming.

Or maybe Peter's spiritual "aha moment" came as Jesus was healing someone. Suddenly the disciple remembered one of his childhood rabbis reading an Old Testament prophecy about the coming Messiah: "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:17, confirming Isaiah 53:4).

There are so many ways the revelation of Jesus's true identity could have happened to Peter; the important point is that *God Himself revealed it*.

I think it is safe to say this is not what happened with Eve. She didn't have *revealed* knowledge; instead she settled for *communicated* knowledge. Perhaps Adam sent her a direct message on Twitter: "Hey, sweetheart, I saw you looking at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Don't touch it! God says we'll die if we eat that fruit!"

## Phase Two

Now that the serpent had Eve's attention solely focused on the one and only forbidden tree, he could initiate step two of his persuasive ploy. This step would be the direct contradiction of what God had already stated. However, it would be cleverly wrapped in what seemed to be sound reasoning, along with the promise of a benefit. Satan countered:

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. *For God knows* that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:4–5)

Consider the serpent's words: "for God knows." They imply something is being withheld—and not just anything, but something that would make Adam and Eve's life better. This something would take them to a higher level! Since there was *good* in this tree, the serpent carefully calculated his logic to appear sound. It worked.

So when the woman saw that the tree was *good* for food, that it was *pleasant* to the eyes, and a tree *desirable to make one wise*, she took of its fruit and ate. (Genesis 3:6)

Eve saw that the tree was good, it was pleasant, and it would make her wise. These all are desirable, beneficial traits.

As Eve was staring at the tree, her thoughts began to go down a new road: *Wait a minute. There's something good and beneficial in that tree, and God's forbidden it. My husband and I could have a better life. We could be wiser and happier, but it's being withheld. I thought our Creator was loving and gracious, but in reality, He's deceptive. He's hiding something good from us.*

With every second that these thoughts permeated her mind, Eve's desire to eat the fruit grew. Her desire was justified the longer she believed there was something good for her in that tree.

The serpent's ultimate tactic was to pervert the character of God in Eve's eyes. If he was successful, he could get her to turn on God. Why? Because God's rule is established and upheld by His character.

King David wrote, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne" (Psalm 89:14). As a king, David knew these traits are the foundation of a lasting leader. If a king is truthful, just, and wise, his reign will not end. If instead a ruler is deceitful and unjust, his reign will not last.

God's character is perfect, but the snake was out to convince Eve otherwise. He sought to skew the evidence. The appearance of the forbidden tree was good and pleasant. It seemed that it would make one wise, but appearances can be deceiving. This is why we are told, "We fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen" (2 Corinthians 4:18 TEV). That which is unseen is the Word of God. His Word is just and accurate.

### Don't Be Deceived

The enemy was able to get Eve to turn on her Creator by undermining her perspective of God's character. Often I've had to fight off similar thoughts in the heat of a battle when I'm not seeing a prayer answered as quickly as I'd hoped. In those situations I remind myself of the faithfulness of God. I coach myself through the reality: *God is not the problem, He's not withholding, and He's a good and gracious Father.*

The serpent got Eve to believe there was something good for her that

God was withholding. If this was successfully accomplished in a perfect environment, with a woman who had never before been abused, offended, or taken advantage of, how much easier is the enemy's task today in a fallen world filled with offense, corruption, perversion, and deceit? For this reason we are strongly warned by the apostle James:

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. (James 1:16)

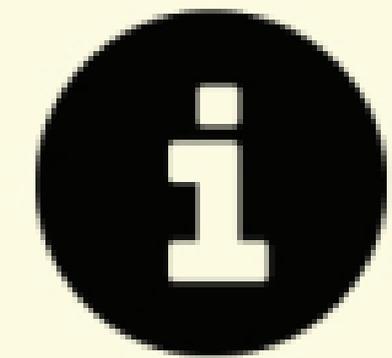
As I like to say, there is only one problem with deception: it's deceiving! The one who is deceived believes wholeheartedly that he or she is correct, accurate, and on the side of truth. But in reality, he or she is wrong, inaccurate, and not on the side of truth. How scary!

Eve was deceived and consequently fell into transgression. James doesn't want us to fall into the same trap. So let's examine his entire statement:

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.  
(James 1:16–17)

James doesn't say that *most* good gifts come from God. That's the opinion of many. No, we are explicitly told that *every* good and perfect gift comes from God. We could just as easily write, "There is nothing good for you outside of God's will." Don't take this next statement lightly or superficially, because there's great depth to it. *It doesn't matter how good something looks, how happy it makes you, how much fun it is, how rich and successful you'll become, how deeply spiritual it appears, how sensible it seems, how popular or accepted it is—and the list goes on and on. If something is contrary to the wisdom (or Word) of God, it will ultimately be detrimental and bring sorrow to your life.*

Eve fully believed she was making a wise choice—a good choice, one that would improve her and her husband's life. It didn't. And if you think



Page 25 is not included in this book preview.

Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you *prosper* and *succeed* in all you do. (Joshua 1:8 NLT)

God guarantees a successful and prosperous life if we carefully obey what is written in His book of instructions. However, this book does not just contain motivating, comforting teachings. It also holds warnings.

Unfortunately, in our day ministers and teachers often avoid these important warnings. These parts of Scripture may be perceived as negative, and we don't want discouraging messages coming from the pulpit because such an approach would be unattractive and thwart church or conference attendance. Consequently, there are many train wrecks among believers that could have been avoided if the individuals had been both taught and warned.

I urge you to settle it now: There is nothing good for you outside of God's wisdom or Word, nothing at all. If you believe this, let's go further in our search for the difference between good and God.