

You better watch out, you better not cry, better not pout, I'm telling you why:

Santa Claus is coming to town.

He's making a list, and checking it twice; gonna find out who's naughty and nice.

Santa Claus is coming to town.

**He sees you when you're sleeping. He knows when you're awake. He knows if
you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake! Oh, you better watch out!**

You better not cry. Better not pout, I'm telling you why:

Santa Claus is coming to town. Santa Claus is coming to town!

John Frederick Coots and Haven Gillespie wrote this song about Christmas called "Santa Claus is Coming to Town." It became a massive hit partly because it was first sung on Eddie Cantor's radio show in November 1934. Over the years this jingle has stayed the course and made an invincible picture of who Santa is. It also has left an imprint on every heart about what is good and what is bad.

This book is all about how we look at blessings and curses. We have been raised to see things as good and bad. I have had people tell me that God is good and religion is bad. For years I have heard people say that our good deeds bring good times, and evil never wins in the end. Yet, we judge our lives daily by the blessings and curses we get, and we judge ourselves by what happens to us. However, maybe blessings and curses don't work that way.

It's good to be nice. It is good to not cry and make a fuss. As children we are schooled on the philosophy of Santa. Behave well and things will go well. Behave badly and things will most definitely go wrong. I can remember being threatened about receiving a rather large lump of coal in my Christmas stocking if I was bad. This good or bad news would be delivered, signed, and sealed by Santa himself. So I had better be good.

Blessings and curses: Chapter 1 "Forged between the good and the bad"

There seems to be no real answer for how coal became the weapon of choice to keep bad children in line. One story comes from Italy where a black (coal-looking) candy was put in stockings as a joke. I like the other story, which states Santa reached into the fireplace and put (non-burning) coal into the stocking instead of a toy. Have you ever seen coal or touched it? It's very black. It gets on everything. Touch it and you will transfer it onto anything you touch. Burn it and it hangs in the air like thick soup. What if coal symbolically represents something more?. There is a saying in the Bible in 1 Corinthians 15:33, which says, "**Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."** Maybe bad behaviour is like coal in that it affects everything.

I have never met someone who does not know the Santa story, or at least the coal part. People also tend to know what love is. Yes, I know the band Foreigner tells us, "I want to know what love is, I want you to show me." Yet, somehow and in some way we all struggle with what love is. The Mills brothers sang in 1944, "**You Always Hurt the One You Love.**" And Sara Desson wrote in her book, *The Truth about Forever*, "**There is never a time or place for true love. It happens accidentally, in a heartbeat, in a single flashing, throbbing moment.**"

It's hard to put a finger on love. Does it happen accidentally in a flashing throbbing moment? In the old days we knew what good and bad behaviour was. Today, most things in life are subjective. What's good for you is fine. What's bad comes down to interpretation. Satan and coal are not as feared as they once were.

Love comes from the heart, doesn't it? I suppose a good heart breeds love and a bad one does not. What happens when good loving intentions turn out badly? Love, kindness, and sin are now mixed together. The water is muddy compared to days gone by. If you thought you knew the difference between good, bad, or what love is, that has been thrown out with the bathwater,

Blessings and curses: Chapter 1 "Forged between the good and the bad"

baby, and the tub in the current times. What we consider good today might have been very bad years ago. It's all about perception now.

Take a moment and read this quote by Paul in the Bible; 1 Corinthians 13:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

Is that Santa Claus in a nutshell? Isn't Santa kind and not easily angered? His rosy red cheeks and perfect Santa Claus smile are iconic symbols of who he was and is to all of us. Sure, Santa gives coal but then again he does check his list twice. That appears to me to be patience and understanding. Santa gives us every chance to be good. Then when December 25 rolls around we find toys and not coal in our stocking.

Santa is always about the good times. Sure, Christmas can be a bad time of year for some, and memories tend to stick with us. How many bad Santa memories do you have? Not many, I hope. I loved racing into the store around December 1 and seeing the big red Santa chair. Waiting in line to see Santa is never too long.

Once I was at a backyard Christmas party. We were sitting in a hot tub drinking Christmas pop. Beside me was a nice man and sometime during the night he said, "I'm Santa you know." I looked into his eyes and he was right. I was sitting in a hot tub with the guy who played Santa in the mall for all those years. I could see it in his eyes.

If we could look God in the eyes would we see the same thing? Do we picture the Lord almighty as we picture Santa? I bet the answer is no for most of us. Christmas might represent good or bad times for us but we rarely blame Santa. However, we do blame God. When things

Blessings and curses: Chapter 1 "Forged between the good and the bad"

go wrong, God is always brought up in one way or the other. Blessings and curses come from God, don't they? Do they come from our actions, karma, or fate? It seems to me we base our lives on these things.

As children, we are schooled to be nice and encouraged, not to be naughty. We are trained to be good people when we grow up. Somewhere along the way good and bad things happen to us and these life events mold us into the people we become. I suspect that certain gifts give us great memories. I also bet not receiving what we wanted caused trouble in our hearts. What we want is important. Anyone who says otherwise is not human. It seems so hard to stay pure and good. We know what's right but life gets in the way.

I remember seeing Charlie Bucket from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* standing outside the candy store, dying to go inside. He was poor, and all he could afford was the ability to stand outside and watch, while the rich kids ate. Receiving is always more fun than watching it vicariously through others. Did he resent those rich children? Did life, at such a young age, make him hard in his heart later in life? Do children grow up blessed and cursed?

There are countless examples of rich kids being blessed while the poor are obviously not. Oh yes, I have heard that what's in the heart counts over money. Ask Charlie Bucket if his good heart is enough. A little candy goes a long way. I find that TV and the movies are an extension of who we really are. Well-meaning psychologists say we are influenced by Hollywood. Maybe Hollywood is a reflection of our black coal hearts. We want love to be a certain way. We want to be rich and live carefree lives. We want to fly and live as pirates. That's why the best movies feature the hero winning in the end. Villains always get what's coming to them. Didn't Charlie get the chocolate in the end?

Blessings and curses: Chapter 1 "Forged between the good and the bad"

Karma literally means "actions" that are good and bad. Fate means "inevitable and unavoidable circumstances." We cheer on the hero because we want them to win. The boy gets the girl of his dreams. Everyone dreams of the perfect soulmate. We have dreams because, in our hearts, dreams are real. They scare us and inspire us. Overall I am trying to paint a picture of who you were as a child. Children are raised to be like their parents. Parents were once children too. That is where traditions are forged. Right and wrong; good and bad; blessings and curses, all forged in our hearts as we grow up. In the end, we measure everything by what is good and what is bad.

We are strange animals. People tell us not to touch fire. At some point, there are stupid curious individuals that have to try. For thousands of years people said, "Don't put your hand in the fire," but in goes the hand nonetheless. Amazingly, we get burned every time. Don't go for the bad boy. Yet, time after time good girls fall for bad boys. We are encouraged to feel compassion for them as they were wronged. The dumb girl is naive and the victim. Why are we not concerned with her actions to begin with? Is it really the bad guy's fault? It always seems like a blessing before it becomes a curse, doesn't it?

What I'm painting here is a self-portrait of each one of us. Our parents trained us. Circumstances train us. Santa left an impression on us. Each one of you have been forged by the events and people around you. I was asked by a mother to finish her kid's ice cream cone. Trust me, that affected me greatly. I was divorced. And that may have affected me too. I've won things and lost things. There are thousands of things in our lives that seem to be blessings and curses.

Where do blessings come from: Santa? Does God sit in heaven and dispense nice things on us from time to time? Who do we blame when things go wrong? Did the devil make me do it?

Blessings and curses: Chapter 1 "Forged between the good and the bad"

Am I inherently evil or am I my own worst enemy? Does God get even and spend His days punishing us in the form of curses? So many questions.

The trouble is, we expect something. We also expect that someone will or has caused good and bad events in our lives. We have been trained as children that bad things happen to bad people. All good people go to heaven, right? If Santa checked his list twice then surely (if I'm good) I'm in with God too. Satan needs coal to run hell, doesn't he? Is that why bad people go there? How often do we say, "I'm due to win, aren't I"? How about, "I'm waiting for my ship to come in." We wait and we expect things to go right, wrong, good, or bad within our lifetime.

Imagine being okay with getting nothing for Christmas. Is that okay with you? Inside your heart there might be a twitch saying, "Nobody cares or loves me." "I don't deserve anything this year." We measure our actions and lives all the time. I prayed today and read my Bible. I feel connected to God today. Yesterday I forgot and wondered if my faith is failing. We judge ourselves and the actions of others constantly. Don't believe me? So what happens if your boss brushes past you and gives you the look. Ten minutes later he calls you into the office. Do you feel panic or euphoria?

You enter his office. The normal sized doors seem bigger and heavier all of a sudden. *Gee, I did make a rather small mistake last week. I thought the boss might not have noticed. Maybe it's bigger than that. Times are tough and layoffs are coming.* Around and around we go judging, evaluating, and analyzing everything that happens. In the office the boss immediately shakes your hand and offers you a raise. He noticed how brilliantly you handled that little mistake and it impressed him. In the door with doom lurking, and out the door in ecstasy. What are we to do with our brains and emotions?

Blessings and curses: Chapter 1 "Forged between the good and the bad"

The Christian music group, *The Newsboys* have a song called "Lord, I Don't Know." It goes, "**Lord, I don't know where all this is going, or how it all works out. Lead me to peace that is past understanding, a peace beyond all doubt.**" They say in 1 John 4:8 that, "**God is love.**" Above I quoted 1 Corinthians 13. Go back and look it over again. The Bible also says in John 3:16 that he loves us. The Lord of love leads to good things and great understanding. Within this book I want to show you that blessings and curses take us there.

We also read that God shares the same heart as the Spirit of God. Look further into Galatians 5:22-23 "**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.**" Things are not always as they seem. Our boss looks angry and we feel guilty. In the end he is happy and we are happy. God might appear angry, frustrated, and mean at times, but the real question should always be, "Why"? God's word says in Romans 8 that those who love Him are to share in His glory. Paul points out in Romans 8:31, "**What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us**"? I believe that Santa is for us. He wants to bring toys over coal. Do we give God the same curtesy?

You see, we evaluate everything. God is either extremely loving, an overbearing warlord, or nonexistent. An atheist has an opinion on God. An atheist has an opinion on Santa, too. Some say we have evil in this world but maintain God cannot exist. Why? It's because throughout their lives they have seen evil. Sometimes goodness is done in private. Evil usually makes its mark in public. Again, there we are making judgments and quantifying everything.

At the end of 1 Corinthians 13 I left out one last part: "Love never fails." The cool thing about love is that it always keeps on trying to do good. One song by Sting says, "If you love someone then set them free." Another by Pat Benatar says, "Love is a battlefield." We gain

Blessings and curses: Chapter 1 “Forged between the good and the bad”

opinions on what love is and what it should do. We expect God to be a certain way, and we expect people to give us a chance. The battlefield of love is that a curse might be a blessing. How does that fit into your judgments in life?

I truly believe that, “A blessing can be a curse, and a curse could be a blessing.” I have a friend at work who has since retired. Let’s call her Beth. One day she approached me to say she had been blessed by God today. She knew I was a Pastor and had to tell me. She went on to say that a few weeks ago she made amends with her father and re-started a relationship with him. Within a week he gave his life to the Lord. Further to that she was given a large inheritance by him. She told me that God’s face was shining upon her because of her actions towards her father.

She had been secretly hoping to retire early. I suppose she wanted to get things straight with her dear old Dad before he died. That inheritance money paved the way for her to retire. Beth was convinced that God did it. Well maybe God did, but did He? All good things come to those who love God, right? I challenged her to consider that blessings don’t come because we do good things. I quoted two verses to her:

Isa 64:6 **“And say all our righteousness’s are as filthy rags.”**

Rom 3:10 **As it is written, “There is none righteous, no, not one.”**

The look on her face said it all. No way, Patrick. *God loves me and He blessed me because I was nice to my father.* Further to that, her face also said, *My father recognized my kindness and returned that favor in money.* She most certainly did not believe me. This story is exactly why I decided to write this book. People believe we *deserve* something because we are either good or bad. People say there is good karma (actions) and bad karma. Beth believed within she was blessed because she blessed.

Blessings and curses: Chapter 1 "Forged between the good and the bad"

The problem with that is God. His actions tell a different story. Isa 55:8 says, "**For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.**"

"Job" in the book of Job tells a different story too. This book opens with Satan challenging God's character. God, in his wisdom, lay a bet with the Devil surrounding this man named Job. In the end, Job loses everything but his cranky wife (go figure). A struggle ensues between Job and his peers. They all try and explain what happened. Really they were saying he was cursed by God.

At the end of this book, God comes back at Job questioning his understanding of God's own motives. Further to that, God blesses him abundantly with more family and riches than he had before. A curse did befall Job. It appears that the word of God also said it happened by no fault of Job. Nothing is ever quite what it seems. My friend Beth probably believes that karma is either a bitch or her best buddy based on her actions. Like I said earlier, is God more pleased when I prayed and read the Bible over when I forgot? Did Job get what he deserved or is something else happening?

I know a guy who believes he is going to heaven. He also believes that some are handpicked to enter while others are not. It is his job to find the ones picked by God. He also believes he does not conscientiously sin anymore. That still blows my mind. He thinks God predestined him for heaven and now he is good enough to get in. I thought we all were sinners and that our actions would never be good enough to get in. I also thought it was God's actions through his son Jesus that opened the door to heaven for us. Again we struggle with good and evil, and blessings and curses.

I will end this chapter with my story. I went through divorce many years ago now. I cannot tell you how many people believed I deserved what I got. I believed them too. In reality I

Blessings and curses: Chapter 1 "Forged between the good and the bad"

was not a bad man, but many told me I was. In time, I became a Christian and went to school to be a Pastor. My ex is not a friend of God but she believes she is a good person. Who am I to argue? Early on she got the house and the kids. I was reduced to a massive child support payment, no house, no kids, and living in a trailer. You tell me who had the good blessings and who was cursed?

Sometime later, I received some money from that divorce and took my kids to Disneyland. I believed my life was turning around. Maybe God was shining his face on me. Maybe I wasn't the bad guy after all. After Disneyland I was offered the chance to go to a Christian festival with the kids. I thought in my heart, as a follower of God, blessings do come to those who love Him. We loaded the car and headed for America. One day on the road we stopped at a lodge for the night. Floating on the water that night I saw dragonflies and bats fighting over the water. The crickets made the experience so surreal. I knew I was a child of God that night.

The following day things began to unravel. Our car overheated and it was almost impossible to get a room. We fixed the car and were swimming in a pool at beautiful hotel that night. God surely does take care of his children. Maybe the unbelieving ex was getting her due. I was the good guy. The next morning was such a great day. The sun was shining and the concert was only hours away. We headed towards an overpass, and I failed to see the light blue car coming at me as I turned onto the highway. My car and trip were totalled in the blink of an eye.

Okay God, it's Your turn. You said we are blessed if we believed. You love those who love You. Things looked different in a 24-hour period as my child lay on the road waiting for the ambulance. Ironically my ex and her boyfriend came and picked us up. I was utterly humiliated. Gladly no one was seriously hurt.

Blessings and curses: Chapter 1 "Forged between the good and the bad"

My perfect Godly life was ruined. There I was: car gone, faith gone, and humility gone. My Dad lent me a mouse-infested car and life could not get much worse. I went from being blessed to cursed all in one day. Either I did not love God enough or He loved me less. This was not the protection from God I deserved, was it?

I think the worst part was driving my kids to my ex's house days later and my muffler fell off. That sound of a Sherman tank has never left me to this day. I was cursed by God for thinking I was better than my ex because I was a Christian. How stupid and naive I was in those days. God does not bless me because I am good (or appear to be). God does not curse someone just because they think bad thoughts. Blessings and curses don't begin in Santa's workshop. I am not loved by God based on how my day went. He is not sitting there checking his list twice to see who has been naughty and nice.

As it was, I became more like Job than I care to admit. A month later I was organizing a Christian event in the park. A young lady approached me and we struck up a conversation. Deep in my heart I knew I was doomed because my trailer and mouse-infested car were no prize for any girl. Could I have seen that seven months later she became my wife? Furthermore, add 11 years and we have been married longer than my first marriage. Life is plain weird. To date my favorite saying is still, "I didn't see that coming." Life seems so random most of the time.

Paul says in Romans 7:15, **"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."** The kicker comes before this verse. Paul always answers his questions before he asks them. I guess that makes him an interesting writer. He says in verses 8-11:

"You shall not covet." 8 But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. 9 I

was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; 10 the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me. 11 For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and by it killed me."

In a nutshell Paul is saying that he felt pride in following God and His word. He felt special. Then all hell broke loose and he felt like the scum of the earth. Paul then realized two things he has since taught me. The first is that God's love is different than how we understand love. Love is not found in bed. Love is not found in acts of kindness. God's love is found in God and in the things He touches. We only love because as John says in 1 John 4:18, **"We love, because he first loved us."**

The second comes in the form of God's teaching. Paul said in Romans 7 that his sin killed him. A verse later (the now dead Paul) says, **"Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure."**

Wrapping this up, Paul got it. He needed to see the bad to understand what is good. I thought I died when I was humiliated on an American highway. That humility brought me understanding. Paul's meaning is that we die to who we were. One day, I thought I alone was special. Through humility I have learned that everyone is special in God's eyes. I needed to see that those who have wronged me are special too. Nobody is above another.

In the Garden of Eden, Eve gazed with sparkling eyes upon the "Fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." She saw it was good and pleasing to the eye. She knew it would give her the understanding she thought. Upon eating it her eyes were indeed opened. God had

Blessings and curses: Chapter 1 "Forged between the good and the bad"

told them prior that they would surely die if they ate it. They died all right. They lost all their innocence. Who they were originally died that day. They experienced shame, mistrust, hunger, pain, and everything else we experience today. Adam and Eve were never the same people again. Like Paul pointed out, that is as good as death. He then goes on to say, "Why do I do what I was never made to do?" Why indeed, Paul?

Blessings and curses are tools God uses to open our eyes to the Truth in life. A blessing can become a curse. And I have witnessed a curse become a blessing. My friend Beth has indeed got it all wrong. We don't love because we love. We love because it makes us feel and look good. If that's not true, then why tell anyone about our good deeds? It's because they are the warm fuzziness we desire. My intent is not to persuade you to stop trying to love. My intent is to help you see what Paul saw. A blessing is nice but a curse can be nice too. Blessings and curses open our eyes to the things we refuse to see. To the things that can humble us and help us.

On the road in America I was humbled. Pride was bubbling in my heart. Did God need to teach me a lesson. No, God wanted to teach me a lesson. There is a difference. I needed that curse so I could see God's blessings. Adam and Eve certainly saw Eden more clearly on the other side of the fence. Hindsight is 20/20 because 20/20 is clear. Failing to succeed is one of the ways God gets us to the best place. Let's explore blessings and curses and see where they can take us; because, perspective is forged between the good and bad.