

I am currently reading a good book by Aravind Adiga called *The White Tiger*. It is the satirical story of a boy's life in India within the caste system and describes the very good and very bad of India. Do I laugh, cry, or become hopelessly disgusted with this story? I am amazed by the writing and horrified by the mental images depicted within. If you follow me on Facebook you will see me always rating everything I do. This book gets a ten, or close to it. The story has jerked my heart strings about what is 'bad' in this world.

That has led me to also ponder the question, "What is good?" *Scream Queens* on TV was hilarious, but I bet many people thought it was a horrible show. *The Walking Dead* is the best TV show I've ever seen, yet I know tons of TV enthusiasts who hate it. I love strawberry but others might prefer orange. Isn't tofu an acquired taste? I hate it. A vegetarian couple insisted that tofu is great in chili. "You won't even taste it," they said. I did, and it still sucks. Still, those poor misguided people love it.

In the past, I think we saw life with defined lines. Oh sure, people liked either chocolate or raspberry, but they knew good from bad. If food went bad they could recognize it with their senses. There was no need for best before dates. Men and women who cheat on their spouses cause trouble. We knew that a complete family made a difference in the lives of children. Drugs were bad. Church was good for the soul in the same way as taking Sunday off was good for the body. Our past generations should receive a little credit for the way they did things.

These days the lines are muddied. Taylor Swift told us in her recent concert that dating and relationships are more complicated than ever. She said, "You know what I mean?" Yes, Taylor we do. A kid these days can't fall in love, stay single or become a doctor. We have attached social tags on everything. You are now labeled now an African American or a Middle

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Eastern Canadian. Kids must decide early on if they're gay, straight, or transgender. You can't simply be Canadian because that's racist. People feel it is necessary to add black, Asian, or gay to their name.

I went to a Comic Expo in Calgary this year. I love the mixture of ages expressing their love for characters in the movies and comics. Age might separate people within generations, but a Comic Expo erases those boundaries. I was in a panel discussion with Gotham's Penguin character. A girl asked the actor Robin Taylor Lloyd what he thought about the penguins' A-sexual status. That was interesting because she had the whole plotline and performance at her disposal for questions yet she asked about the social tag. Something is being missed or lost these days.

In times gone by, we were known by the work we did, our character, or by the faith we held. Today, we can't even be a priest and man of God in a gay church without a social tag. You're now a gay, conservative, or liberal pastor, as if that means something different than a plain old pastor of God. Are these definitions good or bad? Well, that depends on who you talk to. Is an African American different than an American? How can white and black kids grow up the same if they must first divide themselves into sexual and racial corners?

It makes me wonder where we are heading. I knew from early on I was a guy. I looked in the mirror and saw I am a white male. Did it matter that I'm not black? Not to me, but maybe to someone else. On my hockey team I had friends. Were they my white and gay friends? Nope, just my friends. How troubling has this become for kids? They can't play anymore. We fear for their safety from the damaging sunrays and germs far too much. In my day, we never thought about sex, germs, and a whole list of other worries. We simply played, and had fun.,

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I grew up knowing that stealing was wrong and drugs were bad. Today, I see that the police are asking us to do drugs responsibly on TV. In the next commercial someone has died from an overdose, and another has lost their job because of addiction. Our children must have eyes as big as walnuts as they consume all they are supposed to become. Parents say, "Don't do drugs," while in the same breath, they themselves are smoking up. Scout leaders volunteer at a casino to provide finances for the kids camp, but they teach the boys not to rely on gambling. Exactly what is good and bad these days?

I want to concentrate on the good we have in this life. In the first chapter I talked a bit about Santa who seems to be the good guy in our upbringing. What he stood for is still a good message. I said that God is love. God still resonates with some people. I believe God never changes so that might mean He has remained holy and good. There are good and bad parents. If you are complaining about your upbringing, then hand them the training book. Oh right, there isn't one. We learn about the good early on from many peers.

If there is good in this world, it begins with those assigned to us from birth. Whatever they did and believed impacted us forever. Yes, I know we try and raise our kids differently than our parents did. but do we? I have my mom and dad's traits. At 50 years old I can look in the mirror and clearly see my dad. There is a saying I heard and it goes, "We are given traits at birth that are uniquely our own mixed in with all the flaws of our parents." Stats say we tend to follow our parent's views on things.

Is what they taught us good? I don't know but I am certainly stuck with most of it. My mom is funny and asks far too many questions. My dad is cheap but a hard worker. I am all those things. My dad is not a big union guy, and neither am I. Is that good or bad? Did my parents steer me the wrong way? Proverbs 22:6 says, "**Train up a child in the way he should**

**go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.**" We call the Bible old fashioned but the wisdom found in there is not wrong. God knows us as our parents do.

My wife is an amazing example of how we are raised. She lost her mother at an early age and her father abandoned her not long afterwards. She has some of the traits of her father. Her feelings towards her mom and dad differ, but she carries some of their personalities. I met her foster mom, and boy are they alike! I believe, as children, we are big recording devices. All the good and bad become entrenched in our hearts and minds. Is that good or bad? A friend of mine is scared she is too like her mom. I said, 'Take those traits and use them for good.' I think all traits are useful and good.

God made an observation in the first chapter of Genesis that is so important. It says, **"Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good."** We can look around us and see things that are very good. There are also things that, to each of us, seem very bad. I think the reason we have different governments and different religions is because we see things differently. Each one of us comes from forged traditions passed down from our culture and caregiver.

I took a course on American literature. I learned that early American literature is based on a philosophy of valuing money, working hard, and success. That success is valued based on wealth. The likes of Franklin, Emerson, and Faulkner told us this ideology in life lessons written by them about how they lived. Many Americans might disbelieve that is an accurate observation, but I can see it clearly in their culture today from the outside looking in. Who are the (rich) and famous? These stigmas are given with money, popularity, and influence in mind.

Canadians seem to value resources, diversity, and hockey. That means we huddle inside and try to avoid the winter outside. It's hard to be aggressive, successful, and hard working when

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it's cold. I think we apologize so much here because of the Canadian weather. Sorry about that snowstorm. Money is not half as important to us as what province we come from. West and east will always be divided in Canada. The fight over power and resources rage on to this day.

Sunny days are good to an Australian. A winter day playing hockey is like ecstasy to many Canadians. I saw a show years ago in Russia that told a story about their holiday time on an ice breaker. That seems nuts, but they lived for those vacations. Russians smiled as they jumped in frigid waters like Eskimos. Okay, I like Canadian winters but that's crazy. However, each of these views are good in their own culture.

Let's take a closer look at what is good in this world. If God said, "It was very good," then it must be, right? Even though we differ on many things I bet we can agree on a lot too. Spring in Canada is the best time of year. Oh sure, we love summer but spring means we survived winter. When the buds appear on the trees and the grass turns green it is time to venture back outside. There is a lot of good in nature. I remember a friend from Australia posting that she hated winter because it was too cold to go to the beach. That's odd talk from a Canadian point of view.

If it rains too much it's called a flood and that's bad; however, drought is a bad thing too. A forest fire is bad, but seeing nature reforest a burned area is good. Sometimes things have to happen the way they do. Cold weather kills tree-eating beetles, but a warm winter seems a relief from -40 degrees Celsius. Winter weather brings snow and blesses us with the spring run off from the melting snow. Everything has its place. See, the dumb ass Canadian is still talking about the winter in a positive light.

I think one of the best things ever written is Ecclesiastics 3. This Bible book shares the wisdom of Solomon. Verse 1 says, "**To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose**

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**under heaven."** That is so true. A man is hit by a car but marries his nurse. Rick Hanson is disabled because of a truck accident. He was inspired by a fellow athlete who tried to run across Canada for Cancer: Terry Fox. Terry never made it but that event spurred on Rick to finish the job. In 1985 he embarked on the Man in Motion tour to raise awareness for the disabled all over the world. One man's tragedy is another man's opportunity. We need to fail to succeed.

I have mentioned that several times in other writings of mine, and the reason is because I have lived a life of failures and successes. What amazed me the most is how I failed and how I succeeded. It's the same story with other people. Thomas Edison said this about the light bulb: **"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."** Failing can be depressing and disheartening, but does it really have to be that way? I practice to get better, and not to fail yet again.

The good in this world is really a mindset. I don't care much for people who are always Mr. and Mrs. Happy and spread sunshine on everything. We need to have an edge to succeed. If everything is happy and wonderful all the time, then where does the drive to succeed come from? A hockey player is said to grip their stick too tight when they are mired in a scoring slump. The same can be said of a baseball player and his bat. That tight grip is good because it means they care.

The action of pulverizing a trash can in the dressing room in frustration is symbolic. Does it represent frustration and panic? Many would say yes but I see it as positive anger. At what point did Edison give up on a light bulb? To me, that would have happened after the first 100 tries. The fire in his belly would not let it go until he succeeded. I bet he spent a ton on garbage cans. That fire is in a griped stick, smashed can, and 10,000<sup>th</sup> try. It's good to fail because it

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creates creative alternatives. The "I never thought of that" comes from failure. In the end we see the fruits of our labour in the automobile, light bulb, and better access for wheelchairs.

That brings me back to blessings and curses. I bet you wondered if this book, so far, is really about them. It is, but I wanted to set it up. The good and bad are generally attached to blessings and curses. A blessing is good and a curse is bad. I hope to paint a picture that tells a different story. And when God comes into the picture it gets interesting. If we think of blessings and curses as nothing more than fate, then that's all you have. It's complete randomness. However, if God is involved then a blessing can be a curse and a curse can be a blessing. I think that could put a positive spin on how we deal with a life that tries to deal us more curses than blessings.

We sometimes say, "I was dealt a bad hand." That refers to poker. Is life only a random deal of the cards? What if Romans 8:28 meant something more than mere words in a book. It says, **"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."** That is a loaded verse that I could write a whole book on by itself. It fits well with another great verse (31) in the same chapter **"What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"** The "very good" in Genesis 1 might be connected to our lives more than we think. Maybe God loves us more than he hates us. Maybe the hand we are dealt of blessings and curses was meant as a winning hand.

The good does happen more often than we know. Sure, I can't prove it, but I have heard the stories. Chuck Swindol (an American preacher) told about how he loved road rage. It was his quiet time, so to speak. One day he was particularly frustrated while in a traffic jam. Minutes later he saw a terrible accident ahead and a revolutionary thought hit him. If he had been a little

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bit quicker today that might have been him in that accident. Maybe God had saved him by holding up traffic. What he perceived as a curse might have been a blessing.

Now I'm sure God does not go around saving our donkey every minute. I am also sure God does not go around punishing sinners every second. Still, what protection do we get from God, and what are the consequences for our actions? On Earth, we may never know. I feel God is more with us than against us. One guy said, "Grace is God's allowance for sin." I know some well meaning Christians are spitting out their coffee right now. God hates sin, right?

Yes, that is true. I always shudder at Psalm 24:3-4, "**Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart.**" God is in a funny place between crosses and crowns. What I mean is death and glory. You could even say the good and bad. We sin but he still loves us. Somewhere within all that is us receiving blessings and curses. There is good news, though. Jesus is much more than a figure in Bible history. People say all the time, "We need Jesus." So what does that have to do with blessings and curses? Jesus is God, and came down to be a man. I feel he came to experience what we know here on earth. I suppose you could say, to walk a mile in our shoes.

At *Canada Post* many managers have never done my job, which is frustrating as they don't know the problems I endure. The language I speak is not theirs. A priest asked me once if I talk the language of the single people I was trying to reach. That was an interesting question. Jesus coming down to earth is good news because he played our games; spoke our language; felt our pain; and cried our tears. To talk to a God who knows is better than one who has never walked in our shoes.

I feel drawn back to the "very good" statement in Genesis 1. If God took the time to make things very good, then He is interested. If He was willing to do the whole Jesus on earth

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thing, then He is interested. Maybe blessings and curses show us that He is interested in our lives. I wonder if more good things could befall us if we were more interested in God?

Take prayer, for instance. When is the last time you prayed for fun? I mean, you talked with God because you can. I am sad at times because Catholic Christians tend to talk to the saints instead of God. Listen, if Jesus was here then he is more personable than staying in heaven. The personable God wants us to be personable with him.

Prayer is partly the key in my mind when it comes to blessings and curses. Do we pray only in times of trouble? I am stunned to this day that non-believing people send their prayers for the hurting. Sending prayers to who: Santa? Prayer is a connection we have with God. We can talk to someone who is genuinely interested in us, and we can make requests, but is that all there is? We complain, but is that all there is? What about sharing your heart? Jesus shared his heart many times. Read this by Jesus in Luke 7:33-35:

**For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."**

Jesus was misunderstood by many people back then, as he is today. We put way too much stock in holiness compared to the heart. Warning, Christians might be spitting out their coffee again. We assume God cares more for holiness than he does for his sinful creation. You are wrong if you believe that. Why do we still exist if he hates us? We have a God who cares, is interested, and loves us "first" over anger. We need to consider taking all the tags off of blessings and curses. Maybe God is using them for good and good only.

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Think about Joseph in the Bible. That young boy needed to grow, and God used a series of blessings and curses in order for that to happen. Joseph received the blessing of a fancy coat. Joseph was cursed by being thrown in a pit, yet blessed he wasn't killed. He was cursed by being taken away by slave herders and sold to Pharaoh. He was blessed to be put in charge of Egypt. In the end he makes this statement to his brothers in Genesis 50:20 **"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."** God is indeed working for our good through blessings and curses.

I want you to consider praying. Connecting with God daily might bring you wisdom and insight. Maybe the things we call curses might not happen as often if we prayed more. Maybe curses are only bad because we take the small view. Trouble seems so real in the moment. The bigger picture might take time to reveal itself. Attaching God's wrath and displeasure with us through curses might be a bad perception and attitude. Sometime we need to give God time to turn a curse into a blessing. Throughout the Bible there are stories of small things like King David and a mustard seed becoming something much bigger. Is it possible curses are the small beginnings of a bigger blessing?

I prayed for help before my split-up with my first wife. A month later she kicked me out. In hindsight it was a blessing, but at the time it was certainly a curse. Think about winning the lottery. All that money could do so much good. How many people do we read about who lost it all? In many circumstances they lose relationships and most of what they had before: is that a blessing or a curse?

You could say that when God made women, it was a curse. Hold on now Patrick, you are treading on thin ice here. The way I see it, the woman came in and ruined Eden by eating the fruit. Okay, I'm kidding, but it might look that way if you were an alien outsider. Women have

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become a tremendous blessing through their roles as mothers, wives, and friends. Women seem to know when trouble is near. Women are too curious for their own good, but that sixth sense they possess often saves them too. Is a hot woman a curse for unsuspecting males? Maybe women are both blessings and curses?

A news story caught my attention some years ago. A group of girls went to a bar on a popular strip in Calgary. Late at night, at around 2 a.m., there was a shooting inside the bar. One of the girls was struck by accident and killed. What caught my attention was her friend. She was crying and asked, "Why? I thought the bar was safe? Why can't we just go out and have a good time at a bar anymore?" I asked the question, "Where was the woman's sixth sense?"

To some, a bar is good. To others it is a bad place where bad things happen. It's possible bad things happen more often at 2 a.m. rather than at 7 p.m. Maybe we want our sin and cake too. Can we turn a bad place into a blessing? Are there truly any good safe places? Is it more about evil attending good places? I love J Vernon McGee saying there were 13 people in the upper room on the night Jesus was arrested. He believes Satan was in there too. Maybe that's why 13 is a bad number.

Being a cup half full guy is good. Good things do happen to those who wait. I know some people who wait too long and miss opportunities. Santa says, be good for goodness sake. God asks people to be holy as He is holy. So many people pick on themselves and torture the lives of others in the name of holiness. I believe God is saying two things in regards to holiness. One is, go the way of goodness and it will go well. Common sense should prevail. You should be safer in a restaurant at 5 p.m. than in a bar at 2 a.m. Bad people come out in the dark more than in the light.

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Two is, good will always overtake evil. I know in this world it does not look like the good are winning but I feel evil gets noticed more. We tend to report bad things. For some reason we prefer to view the bad over the good. Good news stories happen but we vividly remember the bad ones. Inside us, our emotional strings get pulled harder in bad times. Good times bring about passive comfort with less intense warm fuzzy feelings. I don't think we treat the good with less value it's just that the bad stresses us out more. I think it comes back to the fire. For some reason we have to touch it once to be sure it's hot. Afterwards, with a burnt hand, we know what hot is.

Mark 10:18 says, "**Why do you call me good?**" **Jesus answered. "No one is good-- except God alone."** I agree but God made us in His image. There is a fingerprint of goodness in all of us. A gun is good, but it can be used for bad. People know right from wrong but they choose to do good and bad. I had a friend in grade 8 who was really big and strong. He loved hitting people because he could. It was good for him that he was strong but bad for the rest of us. There is good within people. There is good in this world because God made His creation very good, but we don't see it enough to notice.

Here are some final thoughts on goodness:

Be willing to fail because that makes you tougher, smarter, and wiser.

Look to the good but please don't kill yourself over the bad. I think when a curse happens, it means good things are right around the corner. Is it possible that God is using blessings and curses to teach us? I think about my parents grounding me and spanking me. I liked the grounding more. It's weird because the spanking hurt more but was far shorter than a grounding. Those times groomed me to respect and know the difference between the good and bad.

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These days we tend to not spank or scold our kids. Have they missed the chance to know right from wrong? Do they see the good and bad? Discernment seems lacking in the home, and it has also seeped seamlessly into the bar late at night. That girl said, "Why can't a bad place be safe?" Discernment and knowledge about the good and bad might have saved them some trouble.

I'll leave this chapter with a thought. Think about all the good in this world we never see. The discoveries we tend to credit humans for might be God's good work. When blessings turn into curses we tend to blame others and God. Maybe if we looked for the good we might see the bad a little clearer. There might be no harm in trying and failing. Moreover, that experience might be a good thing.

The good in this world is very good. And the bad is very bad. If blessings and curses were treated equally we could see them all as very good. Blessings are nice and curses are training. We are being trained to look for the good, and we are humbled to appreciate the good. We experience the bad to know that good is better. Maybe blessings and curses are like Santa's workshop and we're the toy. All the hard work that goes into making a toy brings joy to a child when it's done. Think about that as you experience what you call blessings and curses.

Mr. and Mrs. Happy miss some of the important life lessons. They are so concerned with being positive that they ignore the negative. Good things come to those who wait. True, but don't wait too long or you might miss your flight. Looking to God brings clarity to the curses. There is good in everything if we take the time to look. What seems good could be bad if we jump on it too fast. Be good because you know what good is. Look for the good because we all want a good outcome. Some things are plainly bad. To see that and being mindful of it is a good thing.