

Franciscan Spirit and Life

Virtue: Goodness

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Goodness is a term that can be used in many different contexts. For the Franciscan Spirit and Life Program, we will be focusing on the following aspect of goodness:

Definition of goodness:

1. the state or quality of being good.
2. moral excellence; virtue.
3. kindly feeling; kindness; generosity.
4. excellence of quality: *goodness of workmanship*.
5. the best part of anything; essence; strength.

The virtue of goodness, therefore, is the practice of being good, in relation to each of these definitions.

The life of Francis is filled with several instances of goodness. This time, we decided to include members of Francis' brotherhood who epitomized the virtue of goodness :

Faithfulness: Snapshot of two Capuchin Friars who Exemplified Goodness



Saint Leopold Mandic (1866-1942)

entered the Capuchin Order at the age 16, Bogdan and took the religious name of Brother Leopold.

The life of Saint Leopold Mandic is characterized by the contrast between his physical frailty and his spiritual strength. He was born physically weak, and spent the whole of his life in that condition.

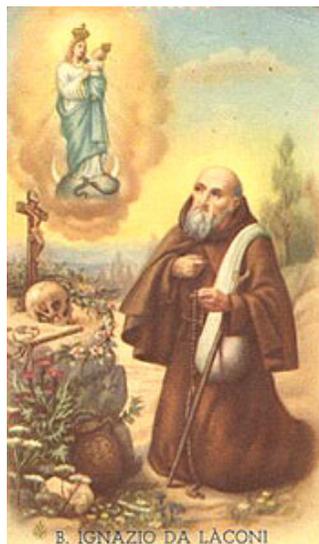
He only reached 4ft 5ins in height and his general health became worse as he grew older. He suffered from abdominal pains, and was gradually deformed by chronic arthritis in later life, making his frame stooped and his hands gnarled, giving him much pain. He also suffered from a stammer in his speech.

Although physically frail, from his youth he showed signs of great spiritual strength, integrity and full of Christian strength. It was his humility and faith in God's Goodness and Providence that enabled him to recognize and accept his poor physical condition. He would say: "Have faith! Everything will be alright. Faith, Faith!"

A compassionate man, Father Leopold gave tremendous encouragement to many people, especially those despairing of hope because of an enslavement to sin. His long service in the Confessional proved to be his own distinct apostolate. For nearly forty years, twelve hours a day, he received, counseled and absolved thousands of penitents. In this work he was a herald of God's love and forgiveness.

His ministry of God's forgiveness in the Confessional can teach us of the real value and importance of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, whereby we rise from the death of sin to the fullness of life in Christ.

Saint Leopold is definitely a man for us and for our time. Beatified by Pope Paul VI on 2nd May, 1976, and canonized by Pope John Paul II on 16th October, 1983.



Saint Ignatius Laconi (1701-1781)

October 21, 1951 marked the date of the Canonization of Ignatius of Laconi, Capuchin Lay Brother.

Francis Ignatius Vincent Peis knew poverty from his very beginnings, but the home of the Peis had a distinctly Christian atmosphere. His father was a quiet, hard working man while his mother, a pious woman, taught him to pray. After some difficulty Vincent began his Novitiate for the lay brotherhood on November 10th 1721. He received the Capuchin habit and the new name of Brother Ignatius.

Immediately following his profession he was the cook for two years. Then for ten years he was cloistered at Iglesias friary, following which he returned to Buoncamino as a weaver. However, within a few short years in 1741 he returned to his task of questing. At this job he remained until his death in 1781. So his "work" consisted mostly of daily walking the streets of Cagliari and begging food for the friars. Very soon he became a familiar figure to the people and became known as "Padre Santo".

The passion became an integral part of his daily life, and it was from this source that came the wisdom, warmth and vitality that the friars and the people found so appealing. The children of Cagliari were particularly fond of their "Padre Santo" with the forked walking stick, the white beard and the faded brown habit. He would tell them stories of saints, and talk to them about God, teaching them to love him and to talk to him in prayer.

Prayers of Goodness

Goodness

Let us pray (in silence) that what is good within us may flourish

pause

God of all power and might,
the author and giver of all good things,
graft in our hearts the love of your name,
increase in us true religion,
nourish in us all goodness,
and of your great mercy
keep us in the same;

through Jesus Christ our Lord
who is alive with with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God now and forever.

Amen

Prayer for Goodness *by Laura Cavicchio*

Source of All Goodness that lives within us, In this moment, In the touch of fingertip to fingertip, hand upon hand, Let us know each other's goodness, Let us feel how fragile, and how strong is our goodness. In this moment we are like one heart beating, We are like one voice crying, For all around us there is hatred: In our streets and homes, in ghettos and shrines and on battlefields, Neighbor upon neighbor, man and woman and child, nation upon nation. We ask, where is goodness? And in our grief, we shed each other's tears.

Source of All Goodness that lives within us, Let us know the power we hold inside. Here is goodness. Here is our hope for peace. In this moment in the touch of fingertip to fingertip, hand upon hand, let our grief be comforted. Let the power of our goodness flow as holy as a heartbeat among us. In this moment, let the voice of our goodness rise greater than a cry, resounding one to another, upon another, Neighbor upon neighbor, man and woman and child, Nation upon nation, One with the goodness of our human family and all Creation. Let all of our goodness be heard,
and let it be the power from this moment on.

Amen.

Prayer for Goodness

O my Jesus, Thou who are very Love,
enkindle in my heart that Divine Fire
which consumes the Saints and transforms them into Thee.

O Lord our God,
we offer Thee our hearts
united in the strongest and most sincere love of brotherhood;
we pray that Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament
may be the daily food of our souls and bodies;
that Jesus may be established as the center of our affections,
even as He was for Mary and Joseph.
Finally, O Lord, may sin never disturb our union on earth;
and may we be eternally united in heaven with Thee
and Mary and Joseph and with all Thy Saints.

Amen.

Prayer of Saint Anthony, Generator of Goodness

Dear St. Anthony, God wants us to see Christ, our brother, in everyone and love Him truly in word and in deed. God wills that we share with others the joy of His boundless love. St. Anthony, Generator of Goodness, remember me in the Father's presence, that I may be generous in sharing the joy of His love. Remember also the special intentions I now entrust to you. (Name them.)

All Is Grace *from various writings of St Therese of Lisieux*

"Even if I had performed all the deeds of St .Paul, I would consider myself an unprofitable servant. I would notice that my hands are empty. But that is precisely the cause of my joy: since I have nothing, I shall expect everything from the good God."

"We must do everything we are obliged to do: give without reckoning, practice virtue whenever opportunity offers, constantly overcome ourselves, prove our love by all the little acts of tenderness and considerations we can muster.

In a word, we must produce all the good works that lie within our strength - out of love for God. But it is in truth indispensable to place our whole trust in Him who alone sanctifies our works and who can sanctify us without works, for He can raise up children to Abraham out of stones.

Yes, it is needful, when we have done everything we believe we have to do, to confess that we are unprofitable servants, at the same time hoping that God, out of grace, will give us everything that we need. This is the way of spiritual childhood."

Story of a Soul Prayer (St. Therese of Liseux)

O Jesus, my Love, my vocation, at last I have found it ... my vocation is Love!
Yes, I have found my place in the Church and it is You, O my God, who have
given me this place; in the heart of the Church, my Mother, *I shall be love!*

Living Our Life

And we pray that we can live our life today so that those who don't know God but
know us come to know God *because* they know us. May our actions this day
show the love of God in our life. And may we remember that we might be the
only book that someone reads that teaches them about goodness. Through
Christ our Lord, Amen.

Seed – Goodness Prayer in the Spirit of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow seeds of love;
Where there is injury, let me sow seeds of pardon;
Where there is discord, let me sow seeds of union;
Where there is doubt, let me sow seeds of faith;
Where there is despair, let me sow seeds of hope;
Where there is darkness, let me sow seeds of light;
And where there is sadness, let me sow seeds of joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console
You in others; to be loved, as to love You in others. For it is in giving that we
receive. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying as a seed to
our selfishness that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Prayer to St. Dymphna - Goodness

You are celebrated St. Dymphna, for your goodness to others. Both in your lifetime, and
even more in the ages since, you have again and again demonstrated your concern for
those who are mentally disturbed or emotionally troubled. Kindly secure for me, then,
some measure of your own serene love, and ask our Lord to give us a share in His life
and boundless charity. Amen.

Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas

Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know you,
a heart to seek you, wisdom to find you, conduct pleasing to you,
faithful perseverance in waiting for you, and a hope of finally embracing you.
Amen.

The Anima Christi

Soul of Christ, sanctify me
Body of Christ, save me
Blood of Christ, inebriate me
Water from Christ's side, wash me
Passion of Christ, strengthen me
O good Jesus, hear me
Within Thy wounds hide me
Suffer me not to be separated from Thee
From the malicious enemy defend me
In the hour of my death call me
And bid me come unto Thee
That I may praise Thee with Thy saints
and with Thy angels
Forever and ever
Amen

Prayer before St. Alphonsus

O my God, help me to remember--- That time is short, eternity is long.
What good is all the greatness of this world at the hour of death?
To love You, my God, and save my soul is the one thing necessary. Without You,
there is no peace, no joy. My God, I need fear nothing but sin. For to lose You,
my God, is to lose all.
O my God, help me to remember---That to gain all I must leave all, that in loving
You I have all good things: the infinite riches of Christ and His Church, the
motherly protection of Mary, peace beyond understanding, joy unspeakable!
Eternal Father, your Son has promised that whatever we ask in His Name will be
given to us. In His Name I pray: give me a burning faith, a joyful hope, a holy love
for Jesus Christ. Give me the grace of perseverance in doing Your will in all
things. Do with me what You will. I repent of having offended You.

Grant, O Lord, that I may love You always and never let me be separated from
You. O my God and my All, make me a saint! Amen. Amen.

A Quick Prayer for Being Good

Dear Lord,
So far today, am I doing alright?
I have not gossiped, lost my temper, been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish or
self-indulgent.
I have not whined, complained, cursed or eaten any chocolate!! And I have not
cheated on any tests, and I have not complained about any teachers.
But I will be getting out of bed in a minute and then I think that I will really need
your help :-)

Amen.

Come, Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit, and fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of Your Divine Love. Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created, and You shall renew the face of the earth. Oh God, Who by the light of the Holy Spirit instructed the hearts of the faithful, Grant, that by the same Spirit we may be truly wise and ever rejoice in His consolation. We ask this through Christ Our Lord.

Amen.

Study Scripture:

Matthew 7:12 - "Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets."

Lesson From Scripture: *The Widow's Offering in Mark 12*

In Mark 12:41-44 there was a collection box at the temple where crowds would go to give their money. Jesus sat and watched all the wealthy people come and drop in large amounts of money. Then came a poor widow who dropped in two coins. Jesus explained to his disciples how her donation was greater than all those that came before her, because she gave all she had. While others gave a portion of their income, she gave it all.

Life Lessons:

Being good is not just about giving money, but giving from the heart. The woman sacrificed her money in order to do good. Goodness is a fruit of the spirit, because it takes effort to cultivate. Matthew 7:12 is often called "The Golden Rule," because it defines how we should treat one another. Sometimes we need to put effort into how we speak and act toward one another. We need to ask ourselves how we would feel if we were treated the way we were treating others.

Being good is not necessarily about making easy choices. There are so many messages out there telling us it is okay to "sin." Today we are taught that "if it feels good, it must be good." Yet the Bible tells us many different things about those "feel good" acts like sex and drinking. While some of them are good things, they are usually good in the right context.

Yet goodness comes from a place in our hearts. It comes from a focus on God and not a focus on what the world tells us is good. While both versions of goodness can overlap, a Christian teen's focus should be on God's idea of good.

Prayer Focus:

In your prayers this week ask God to show you true goodness. Ask Him to help the fruit of goodness to grow in your heart so you can treat others well. Ask Him to give you insight into your behavior and see how others are affected by your actions.

Quotations Related to Goodness

“Do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, to all the souls you can, in every place you can, at all the times you can, with all the zeal you can, as long as ever you can” ~John Wesley

"Work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed." ~ Vaclav Havel

Be so good they can't ignore you. ~ Steve Martin

A man is only as good as what he loves. ~ Saul Bellow

“Seek peace, and pursue it. ~ Proverbs 34:14

But goodness alone is never enough. A hard cold wisdom is required, too, for goodness to accomplish good. Goodness without wisdom invariably accomplishes evil. ~ Robert Heinlein

There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. ~ William Shakespeare

When you make up your mind to do good things, you will accomplish them if you use dynamic will power to follow through. No matter what the circumstances are, if you go on trying, God will create the means by which your will shall find its proper reward. ~ Paramahansa Yogananda

Goodness is the only investment that never fails. ~ Henry David Thoreau

Be patient and you will finally win, for a soft tongue can break hard bones. ~Proverbs 28:13

He that does good for good's sake, seeks neither praise or reward, but he is sure of both in the end.~ William Penn

Goodness is a special kind of truth and beauty. It is truth and beauty in human behavior. ~ H. A. Overstreet

There is so much goodness in real life-- do let us keep it out of our books. ~ Norman Douglas

My country is the world, and my religion is to do good. ~ Thomas Paine

To talk goodness is not good. Only to do it is. ~ Chinese Proverb

Find the good. It's all around you. Find it, showcase it, and you'll start believing in it. ~ Jesse Owens

My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me. ~ Psalms 144:2

Little progress can be made by merely attempting to repress what is evil; our great hope lies in developing what is good. ~ Calvin Coolidge

Leave something good in every day. ~ Dolly Parton

Goodness begins simply with the fact of life itself. ~ Gwendolyn Brooks

The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share our riches but to reveal to him his own. ~ Benjamin Disraeli

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling ~ 1 Peter 4:8-9

The point is to be good--to be sensitive and sincere. ~ J. B. Priestley

Do good and don't worry to whom. ~ Mexican Proverb

Wise men appreciate all men, for they see the good in each and know how hard it is to make anything good. ~ Baltasar Gracián

Discussion Starter Stories on Goodness

Oliver

Chris deVinck had a brother named Oliver who was severely handicapped, blind, and bedridden. No one was sure whether Oliver was aware of the world around him, although he did eat when he was fed. Though he lived to be over 30, feeding him was like feeding an eight-month-old child. He required 24-hour care, which his mother gave him until the day he died. Chris remembers...

When I was in my early 20s, I met a girl, and I fell in love. After a few months I brought her home for dinner to meet my family. After the introductions and some small talk, my mother went to the kitchen to check the meal, and I asked the girl, "Would you like to see Oliver?" for I had, of course, told her about my brother.

"No," she answered. She did not want to see him. It was as if she slapped me in the face. In response I mumbled something polite and walked to the dining room.

Soon after, I met Roe, Rosemary—a dark-haired, dark-eyed, lovely girl. She asked me the names of my brothers and sisters. She bought me a copy of *The Little Prince*. She loved children. I thought she was wonderful. I brought her home after a few months to meet my family. The introductions. The small talk. We ate dinner; then it was time for me to feed Oliver. I walked into the kitchen, reached for the red bowl and the egg, cereal, milk, and banana and prepared Oliver's meal.

Then, I remember, I sheepishly asked Roe if she'd like to come upstairs and see Oliver.

"Sure," she said, and up the stairs we went. I sat on Oliver's bed as Roe stood and watched over my shoulder. I gave him his first spoonful, then his second.

"Can I do that?" she asked with ease, with freedom, with compassion. So I gave her the bowl, and she fed Oliver one spoonful at a time.

Which girl would you marry?

Today Roe and I have three children.

There's a lot of truth in the old saying, "A person who is nice to you, but not nice to others, is not a nice person." That's one of the reasons that Jesus pointed to the outcasts of the world—those who were handicapped, those who were poor, those who were in prison, those who were considered "the least"—and said, in effect, "Those people are just like me. If you love me, then you will also love them." (See Matthew 25:31-46.)

Anyone can love the healthy, the successful, and the glamorous. There's little nobility or courage in that. But God calls us to a higher standard—to love the world just as he does. "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

No Greater Love

In the open salvos of World War II, a large British military force on the European continent, along with some English citizens and diplomats, retreated to the French coastal port of Dunkirk. With its back against the English Channel, the British army faced a German army that threatened to drive it into the sea. To save what he could of his army, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill called for all available sea vessels, whether large or small, to evacuate the soldiers and civilians from the besieged French beaches and bring them back across the Channel to safety.

An incredible array of ships and boats raced to the rescue—fishing boats and cruise ships alike. As the flotilla made its way to the beach to pick up soldiers and then move out again, Nazi aircraft set upon them like vultures while German artillery pummeled them with shells. Ships were strafed with machine gun fire, and some were blown out of the water altogether.

Three German Messerschmits attacked the defenseless *Lancastria*, a converted cruise liner, whose decks and hold were packed with soldiers. One bomb dropped directly down the ship's smokestack, tearing a huge gap in her lower hull. Nearly 200 men were trapped in the forward hold of the now severely listing ship. No one doubted that the liner was going down. Chaos, smoke, oil, fire, and blood, mixed with terrified cries of the men trapped below, created pandemonium on deck as those hopeful of surviving searched for lifeboats or simply leaped into the water.

Moving through the middle of this living nightmare, a young Navy chaplain quietly worked his way to the edge of the hold and peered in at the darkness below.

Then, knowing he could never get out, he lowered himself in.

Survivors later told how the only thing that gave them courage to survive until passing ships could rescue them was hearing the strong, brave voices of the men in the hold singing hymns as the ship finally rolled over and went to the bottom

This true story testifies to the courage and compassion of one faithful Christian who gave his life to provide comfort, courage, and hope to the suffering. We are also called to demonstrate that kind of love in our lost and dying world. This is the true meaning of goodness.

The Old Monastery

There was once an old monastery that had fallen upon hard times. Centuries earlier, it had been a thriving center where many dedicated monks lived and worked and had great influence on the realm. But now only five monks lived there, and they were all over seventy years old. This was clearly a dying order.

A few miles from the monastery lived an old hermit who many thought was a prophet. One day as the monks agonized over the impending demise of their order, they decided to visit the hermit to see if he might have some advice for them. Perhaps he would be able to see the future and show them what they could do to save the monastery.

The hermit welcomed the five monks to his hut, but when they explained the purpose of their visit, the hermit could only commiserate with them. "Yes, I understand how it is," said the hermit. "The spirit has gone out of the people. Hardly anyone cares much for the old things anymore."

"Is there anything you can tell us," the abbot inquired of the hermit, "that would help us save the monastery?"

"No, I'm sorry," said the hermit. "I don't know how your monastery can be saved. The only thing that I can tell you is that one of you is an apostle of God."

The monks were both disappointed and confused by the hermit's cryptic statement. They returned to the monastery, wondering what the hermit could have meant by the statement, "One of you is an apostle of God." For months after their visit, the monks pondered the significance of the hermit's words.

"One of us is an apostle of God," they mused. "Did he actually mean one of us monks here at the monastery? That's impossible. We are all too old. We are too insignificant. On the other hand, what if it's true? And if it is true, then which one of us is it?"

One monk's contemplation was similar to the four others': "Do you suppose he meant the abbot? Yes, if he meant anyone, he probably meant the abbot. He has been our leader for more than a generation. On the other hand, he might have meant Brother Thomas. Certainly Brother Thomas is a holy man—a man of wisdom and light. He couldn't have meant Brother Elred. Elred gets crotchety at times and is difficult to reason with. On the other hand, he is almost always right. Maybe the hermit did mean Brother Elred. But surely he could not have meant Brother Phillip. Phillip is so passive, so shy—a real nobody. Still, he's always there when you need him. He's loyal and trustworthy. Yes, he could have meant Phillip. Of course, the hermit didn't mean me. He couldn't possibly have meant me. I'm just an ordinary person. Yet, suppose he did? Suppose I am an apostle of God? Oh God, not me. I couldn't be that much for you. Or could I?"

As they continued to mull the hermit's words, the old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off chance that one of them might actually be an apostle of God. And on the off-off chance that he himself might be the apostle spoken of by the hermit, each monk began to treat himself with extraordinary respect.

Because the monastery was situated in a beautiful forest, many people came there to picnic on its tiny lawn and to walk on its paths, and even now and then to go into the tiny chapel to meditate. As they did so, without even being conscious of it, they sensed the aura of extraordinary respect that now began to surround the five old monks and

seemed to radiate out of them, permeating the atmosphere of the place. There was something strangely attractive, even compelling, about it. Hardly knowing why, people began to come back to the monastery more frequently to picnic, to play, to pray. They began to bring their friends to show them this special place. And their friends brought their friends.

As more and more visitors came, some of the younger men started to talk with the old monks. After a while one asked if he could join them. Then another. And another. Within a few years the monastery had once again become a thriving order and, thanks to the hermit's gift, a vibrant center of light and spirituality throughout the realm.

Sometimes, just like the old monks, we ask, "How can we attract more goodness to our school? How can we get some new life in here and grow, both numerically and spiritually?" Perhaps the answer has to do with how we regard each other. How do we treat each other? Are we always putting each other down and creating an atmosphere of criticism and negativism? Or are we treating each other with extraordinary dignity and respect?

John 17 records Jesus' prayer to his Father for the church—for you and me. He asked that all of us would be one so that the world might believe. When we care for each other and treat each other with love and respect, then those in the world find the church to be attractive, even compelling. Let's stop fighting and hurting each other and instead, begin being good to each other.

Famous Bumper Stickers

Your kid may be an honors student, but you're still an idiot.

Cover me. I'm changing lanes.

I brake for no apparent reason.

Learn from your parents' mistakes—use birth control.

Forget about World Peace. Visualize using your turn signal.

We have enough youth; how about a Fountain of Smart?

He who laughs last, thinks slowest.

Lottery: A tax on people who are bad at math.

Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine.

Time is what keeps everything from happening at once.

I love cats...they taste just like chicken.

Forget the Joneses; I keep up with the Simpsons.

The more people I meet, the more I like my dog.

Sometimes I wake up grumpy; other times I let him sleep.

Work is for people who don't know how to fish.

I didn't fight my way to the top of the food chain to be a vegetarian.

Where there's a will, I want to be in it.

Okay, who stopped payment on my reality check?

Hard work pays off in the future. But laziness pays off right now.

It's lonely at the top, but you eat better.

We are born naked, wet, and hungry. Then things get worse.

Always remember you're unique, just like everyone else.

Very funny Scotty, now beam down my clothes.

Be nice to your kids. They'll choose your nursing home.

There are 3 kinds of people: those who can count & those who can't.

Why is "abbreviation" such a long word?

Ever stop to think and forget to start again?

Some bumper stickers are funny, some are informative, some make you think, others make you mad. In any case they're usually a reflection of the person who is driving the car. If a bumper sticker is funny, you think to yourself, "The person driving this car must have a sense of humor." If the bumper sticker is vulgar and mean-spirited, you might think, "I certainly don't want to meet up with that guy." (Note: Ask the students to react to some of the bumper stickers on this list. What kind of person do you think would have this particular sticker on his or her car?)

When it comes to bumper stickers, the words on the outside of a car are often an indicator of what's on the inside of the car. In the same way, the words that come out of our mouths are often an indicator of what kind of person we are on the inside. (Matthew 15:18) Goodness is action, and action requires a bit of reflection as to who we are and what we are called to be, say, and do.

Saving Private Ryan

One of the most powerful films in recent history is Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*. The film begins on D-Day, June 6, 1944, as the Nazis were advancing across Western Europe. Faced with the ugly possibility of defeat, the Allied powers staged on the beaches of Normandy the greatest military invasion in history. Their goal was to cripple the German army and ultimately force Hitler and his army into retreat.

Following the bloody battle, Captain John Miller (played by Tom Hanks) and his surviving company of soldiers receive very unusual orders from their commander. They must locate and rescue a soldier, Private James Ryan (played by Matt Damon), who is fighting somewhere behind enemy lines. We are told that Ryan and his three older brothers enlisted in the Army. What Private Ryan doesn't know is that all three of his brothers perished during the Normandy invasion. To spare Private Ryan's mother the anguish of losing all four of her sons, Miller and his men must find James and bring him back alive.

As Miller and his eight men move deeper into enemy territory in search of Ryan, they engage in an intense debate about why one man's life is so important that they should risk theirs. "This Ryan better be worth it," Miller says. "He better go home and cure some disease or invent a new longer-lasting light bulb."

Despite their misgivings, Captain Miller's band of soldiers bravely carry out their orders, with several of them paying the ultimate price as they successfully locate and rescue the young soldier. In the final battle scene, Miller takes a bullet that will ultimately cost him his life. But before he dies, he whispers to Private Ryan, who is kneeling by his side, "Earn this...earn it."

The movie ends with a scene set some fifty years after the war, with the elderly James Ryan standing over Captain Miller's grave at Arlington National Cemetery. With a trembling voice, he says, "Every day I think about what you said to me that day on the bridge. I've tried to live my life the best I could. I hope that was enough...I hope I earned what you did for me."

In the movie, Ryan then asks his wife, "Have I been a good man?" For 50 years, he was tormented by the realization that he could never do enough to earn what Captain Miller and his men did for him.

When we hear about Christianity, we are taught that we can never do anything to lose God's love for us. It is a gift, and we will never have to wonder if we are good enough to earn it. Does that mean we live our lives as if nothing happened? Do we go on living as we did before? "By no means!" writes Paul in Romans 6:2. Instead, we demonstrate that we have new life in Christ by living in obedience to him. Our good works won't earn our salvation, but they will provide evidence that we have gratefully received it.