

### ***“What Do You Want To Be Like When You Grow Up?—Goodness and Faithfulness”***

Today we're continuing to look at the question, "What do you want to be like when you grow up?" It's a baited question, because we're also looking at the answer. Because the Apostle Paul gives us a list of characteristics that he calls the fruit of the Spirit, and implies, "This is your goal. This is what you should strive to look like as you grow up." He says, "**The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control**" (Galatians 5:22-23). I hope you've got that memorized, or are close to having it memorized. When we commit something to memory, it becomes a part of our vocabulary, and it can then be lived out in our actions.

As we look at this list of characteristics, the idea is that we are never really done becoming. That as long as we are still breathing there is the possibility of becoming what we have the potential to become. We have the ability to live into what we were made for. To have growing evidence in our lives of these fruits of the Spirit. God plants the seeds, we nurture and cultivate them. If we don't do our part, we limit, or hamper the growth of these characteristics.

And if we aren't intentional about nurturing these things, the Paul points out that we will naturally drift into some pretty nasty traits that he calls the works of the flesh. I shared a few weeks ago that I planted some tomato plants this spring, right before the tornado, actually, and on Tuesday I picked my first handful of cherry tomatoes. I was so proud. Now, so far I've not used any chemicals on my tomatoes and have had very few bugs on them, but I'm trying to keep a close eye. And Tuesday morning as I went out to water them, I saw what every tomato gardener fears, tomato horn worms. You can always tell they're their because of their droppings. This one ate about 25% of one of my plants overnight. Now, I am a live-and-let-live kind of guy. When I find spiders in my house, I take them outside and let them go. Same thing with lady bugs. Toward them I exude the fruits of the Spirit I talked about last week, patience and kindness. Toward this tomato hornworm, not so much. I introduced this one to tomato hornworm heaven.

I bring this up, because if we are truly working to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in ourselves, we've got to be vigilant about the pests that want to destroy the characteristics we're trying to nurture. And the tomato hornworms in your life can do a lot of damage in a short amount of time, if you don't do something about it. Do something about that attitude that's creeping in that's eating away at your marriage, do something about that apathy that's eating away at your faith. Do something about that addiction, or before you know it, all you got left is a bunch hornworm droppings.

Our spiritual lives, our lives in every way, are a partnership with God. God's doing his part, and he expects us to do ours. You and I have to nurture and protect what we're trying grow.

Now, today the two characteristics, the two fruits of the Spirit, we're going to get in front of us are **Goodness and Faithfulness**. Now in some translations of this passage the word goodness here is translated as the word "generosity". Which is it? Goodness or generosity? Well, it's actually both. When the word "goodness" is used, it's not moral goodness. This goodness is about giving yourself to other people in a way that costs you something. Like helping others financially, or with your time, or with your skills. The opposite of this goodness is being a miser or a hoarder. The root of the word miserable is the word miser. I don't want to be that!

As I grow up, I want to be the kind of person who freely gives, who recognizes that I've been blessed in order to be a blessing. That's what it means to truly be human. Jesus said it this way, "**To the one who has been given much, much will be expected**" (Luke 12:48). He commanded that because he knew the effects generosity has. It has a profound effect on the people on the receiving end of that generosity, AND it has an effect on those who are generous. It changes us.

Have you ever been on the receiving end of generosity? I have. A few weeks ago some friends from church gave us a week of their time share for a vacation later this year. They said, "We know that this has been a difficult time and we just want to do this for your family." Now, please understand, you pay me enough to go on a vacation every year, but that act of generosity, makes me want to be more generous. And what we're able to do with the money we've saved for vacation, is give it away to some other needs in our community. Generosity breeds generosity.

Last week this little ziplock bag was dropped off for me. The note inside says, "From Lemonade and cookie sale. Mallory Chapman age 7 and Bennett Chapman age 5." They live in the K.C. area and they're grandkids of people at Saint Paul's. I picture these two little kids on the corner of their street, in the hot sun, selling lemonade and homemade cookies at a card table with a little sign hanging off it that says, "For the people of Joplin."

They raised \$14.88. And it made me feel so good to receive that for the people of Joplin, but I bet it made Mallory and Bennett feel so good to know that they gave of themselves help out somebody else. That's what this goodness, this generosity, looks like.

Over the years we've had several girls in our church who have given their hair to locks of love. Locks of love uses that hair to make wigs for other children who have lost their hair because of cancer treatment. That's what generosity looks like. It's that kind of goodness that freely gives to other people what you have that you can offer to bless and care for them and in the process you are blessed.

One little boy wanted to give away his bike to a boy in Joplin that lost his in the tornado. I got to be the intermediary and drop off the bike to Ian Surbrugg. I wasn't the one who donated the bike, but it made ME feel so good just to deliver it! I got some second hand joy from someone else's generosity!

Every week here at Saint Paul's, or almost every week, we give you opportunities to give of your time, or talents, or resources. Yesterday a group of us worked on several projects for tornado recovery. We ended up doing all kinds of things, and I can't say that I was eager to get out there on a 100 degree day, when I haven't had many days off lately, but it felt so good to do it. It felt really good!

Part of the job of your church here is to give you opportunities all the time to be generous with your time, your talents, and your money. Almost every week we have a special offering for one of our partner ministries, or camp for kids, or Bright Futures, or...Every once in a while I'll hear somebody say, "Man, you are always asking me for time, for stuff, for money. When does it end?" But when we do a special offering or ask for your time, we're not expecting every single person to give to every single special offering or every request for your time. Consider it, pray about it, and give as you can.

Today we had a special offering for Watered Gardens, and we're also asking you to consider giving blood. We're always asking you for something and you can look at that and say, "I'm sick of it?" Or you can say, "I'm glad I'm a part of a church that's really trying to make a difference in my community and my world. Isn't it cool that we partner with Cecil Floyd and provide backpacks and school supplies and fun events for the kids and families there? Isn't it awesome that we collected almost \$4,000 for water filters for the people of Haiti? Isn't it awesome that every month we provide for the poor and homeless at Watered Gardens? Isn't it awesome that we support Ascent Recovery and I get to help men break out of addiction? Isn't it awesome that we're sending teams out every Saturday to help tornado victims? Isn't awesome that I can come to church and give blood and save a life and get a dessert at the same time."

It's awesome, and as we live out this form of goodness, this generosity, it does good and it feels good. Most of the time. I say that because doing good and being generous doesn't always feel so good. And we can't live out goodness just because we want to feel good.

Last week, Shannon Kelly shared a story with me. He had volunteered with some friends to help with tornado clean up several weeks ago. They found a home and just started to help drag debris to the curb. He said it was hot, hard work, but what made it harder is the owners of the home, didn't help them, kind of ordered them around like they were slaves, didn't thank them for their help. He said he and the others were ticked at how they were treated and vowed never to come back there.

But he said the next day he just felt compelled to go back to those ungrateful people and keep working. And he did. They sat inside and came out occasionally to give a few orders. But never thanked him, never offered to help him. He just kept dragging stuff to the curb. Shannon said he sat in his car exhausted after helping out those ungrateful people for a second day and asked, "God, why am I here? What am I doing? Why did I feel like you sent me back here today?"

He said that he got his answer. That it wasn't then, or ever, about what you get out of it. He said it was the most amazing revelation and created this desire to specifically seek out people who would never be grateful, or thankful and find ways to help them. He said, "I'm so pumped up about helping ungrateful people

now, I can't hardly contain myself!" Listen, when we're good with not feeling good when we do good, then we feel great! That's so God!

Let's move on into the next fruit of the Spirit which is faithfulness. Now **the Greek word for faithfulness is *pistis***. It can actually mean faith or faithfulness, and the first idea behind this word is simple trust. It's a trust in God. It's a heart-felt confidence in God. That God is, that God forces all things to work together for good, that God will never abandon us, or leave us, or forsake us. So part of this fruit of the Spirit is simply about us growing in our trust of God. And like all the other fruits of the Spirit, it doesn't happen unless we're doing something to cultivate it. If you stop going to worship, if you stop reading your Bible, if you stop hanging around with other people of faith, and you just get caught up in what's happening in your life, after a while you begin wonder, "Why don't I feel close to God anymore?" Then you begin to wonder, "Maybe there really isn't a God."

That's not how it's supposed to be. The older you get the more confident you are meant to be in your trust. There was a time in my life when I wanted to have it all figured out and have all the answers to questions about faith, and have everything nailed down perfectly. But as I've grown older, I've become more aware that my little brain can barely begin to comprehend God. That the more I know, the more I realize I don't know. And the older I've gotten the more comfortable I've become with mystery and grace, and not having all the answers and being willing to say that. There was a time when I didn't want to ever say that. Right now I can tell you that my faith has never been stronger, but in some ways I actually have fewer answers than used to. I've also come to believe that faith isn't faith if you have all the answers.

I'm not so interested in controlling situations, or people, or events like I used to. I have deeper trust, a deeper faith. It took time and experience to develop. But you have to cultivate this. You don't drift in to faith. You cultivate it by worship and prayer, and study, and being with other people of faith, and reading scripture, and journaling, and serving others.

So that's faith, but then there is faithfulness. Faithfulness to God. We have a baptism today and we'll have a river baptism in August, I baptized a man in my office on Thursday! And in baptism we enter into a covenant with God. God claims us as his children, and we also claim God. If you were baptized as a baby, your parents spoke on your behalf, but at some point you have to confirm that covenant for yourself, you have to own it for yourself. A some point you have to say for yourself, "I am a follower of Jesus Christ and I commit my life to him."

You might make that statement at a beginning point in your faith journey, but faithfulness means you make that statement over and over and over and over again throughout your life. It's not just about you trusting God, about God trusting you. Can God trust you with the little things so that he can entrust bigger things to you—responsibilities, resources, talents. God wants you to be faithful.

And of course faithfulness has to do with our relationships to other people. Can our boss, or our employees, can they count on us? Or our neighbors, can they count on us to be the person we said we would be? When we make promises do we fulfill them? The times when I am most disappointing to myself is when I make promises that I can't fulfill. Being faithful is about integrity. That my words and actions line up with one another. You know people who talk a good talk, but they don't walk it. And after a while you just start keeping your distance because you can't count on them for anything.

But on the other hand, we love being around people who live out faithfulness through their integrity and trustworthiness. We love being around people that we say about them, "Their word is their bond. If she said it, she will do it, or die trying. You can always count on him to come through." That's the fruit of faithfulness.

Then of course we see how faithfulness plays such an important part in our most intimate relationships—our marriages. The opposite of faithfulness is infidelity and when we hear that word we almost always think about sexual infidelity. Of course that is so destructive to any relationship. But infidelity also comes when I'm not fulfilling the other parts of my wedding vows. Those vows to love and care for one another for richer, for poorer, in sickness, and in health, to love and to cherish until you are parted by death. Being faithful in

marriage is about being faithful in these things too. And for lots of people, they are unfaithful in these things first, and then that leads to sexual infidelity.

When we stop caring, when we stop encouraging, when we stop giving ourselves to the other, that's infidelity, unfaithfulness, to our marriage vow. There's always somebody in the news who has been unfaithful, whether it's Tiger Woods, or Arnold Schwarzenegger, or the head of the IMF. We've all seen the pain that comes from infidelity.

For us, if we're not cultivating the fruit of the Spirit of faithfulness, it's highly likely that someday we will find ourselves being unfaithful in one way or another. Remember, the drift is toward the works of the flesh, unfaithfulness, adultery.

I try to cultivate faithfulness every day in my prayer life, "God, help me to be faithful to Janet in every facet of my vow to her, to love and to cherish, in good times and bad, in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer, until we are parted by death. Help me to be the husband that she needs me to be, help me to love her deeply and find ways to demonstrate that love." I've never been sexually unfaithful to Janet, but in terms of caring for her, and giving her the love she deserves, I've been unfaithful too many times to count. So we cultivate and nurture faithfulness. That means we have a picture in our minds of what faithfulness looks like and we work to live into that. And God is ready and willing to help us.

In a room this size I'm guessing that there may be 15 or 20 of you who are wrestling with the temptation to be sexually unfaithful to your spouse. You've been thinking about it, you've been flirting with it, you've been playing with it. I've got to tell this: Please stop. Please stop. That path is not going to lead to the life and joy you want. It's going to lead to pain for you, for your spouse, for a whole bunch of other people. Please, stop. Maybe you're in worship today because God wanted you to hear this. God is pleading with you saying, "I want the best for your life and infidelity will only hurt you." If you need to talk to somebody, call one of us pastors. Have a confidential conversation with one of us. We will help, we'll offer some guidance, we'll offer support and ways to find the right path. But cultivate faithfulness.

Jesus told a story about a servant who was given a great gift by his master and that servant handled that gift with care and used it wisely. Jesus said this, "**The master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'**" (Matthew 25:21).

When I get to the end of my life, those are the words I want to hear from Jesus as I stand there face to face. I really do want to hear him say, "Well done good and faithful servant...come and share in your master's happiness." But I know I've got to work on that, and you do too. Because isn't that what you want to hear too?

Please in your heart of hearts, commit to cultivating goodness and faithfulness. These amazing fruits of the Spirit that lead to life and joy. And do what you have to do to pull out the tomato hornworms that would start devouring the good things in your life. What do you want to be like when you grow up? I want to have increasing character qualities of goodness and faithfulness. What about you? And for today, that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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