

Fruit of the Spirit

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul lays out two different ways of living. One way is to live under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. The other is to live driven by our own worldly desires. The true goal in the Christian life is for them to become the same – so that what the Spirit desires for us is what we come to desire.

When we are under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this list tells us what that looks like. This list is sort of like a mirror.

By contrast, living by the flesh looks like conceit and envy. A little before the verses we read, Paul listed a whole bunch of behaviors that are on display when selfish desires rather than the Spirit are directing the show.

He listed sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions,²¹ envy, drunkenness, and carousing.

This is not going to be a sermon series of you should...you should be generous...you should be loving, and so on.

Jesus people do not bear the fruit of the Spirit just because they should. “You should” is essentially what Paul means when he talks about the law. Instead, Jesus people do these things because it’s now who they are.

It’s because Christ in the Spirit lives in them. Of course we are yet imperfect, so to do them just because we should is better than living by our own selfish desires. But when Jesus really gets hold of us, this simply becomes who we are.

During this series we’re mostly going to reflect on those times when we truly feel like these fruits of the Spirit have bubbled up from our hearts.

And we’ll also recognize that sometimes we fail...and sometimes our motives are mixed.

We’re starting with generosity. It’s not the first on Paul’s list, but the order isn’t probably that important and generosity is probably one of the easiest for us to talk about without much prep.

Part of what we’ll do as we go through this series is tell stories of when we have demonstrated these fruits.

I think that generosity is the fruit I find easiest – we'll probably each find one that most frequently bubbles up from us.

There are lots of ways to be generous. Maybe you like to prepare nice dinners for family and friends. Maybe you're generous with your time, volunteering when help is needed.

Seven or eight years ago I volunteered to chair a committee in our Waverly community foundation to build a new aquatic center. There were definitely frustrations along the way, but last summer the Waverly Aquatic Center opened. It's a great thing for the community.

In addition to being generous with my time, Daryl and I were one of the larger donors to the project. None of that to me felt like something I was doing out of some sense of obligation, but rather something I felt drawn to do. It was something I believed would make our community better and that was motivation enough.

Now, there's a lot of satisfaction when I walk by the pool and see it full of kids having fun.

While generosity is the work of the Holy Spirit in us, there are things we can do that will help us get in line with what the Spirit wants to do in and through us. I think the thing that has most helped me, and I know others have said the same, is actually getting to know people and their needs and struggles.

Before we even started with the aquatic center we reached out to listen to what people in the community felt the needs were. Listening usually brings a clarity we can't get to otherwise.

I'm inspired towards generosity when I've gotten to know people who struggle to afford even the basics. The problem of poverty can feel daunting, because no one person or family can be generous enough to make sure everyone has enough. And generosity alone isn't the answer. But it can help.

I've been in two countries in Africa, Tanzania and Rwanda. They're the only countries in the world I've been to that are truly poor. The needs throughout the continent are vast...greater than in our country. Again, the generosity of any one person will never be enough. And honestly, generosity – charity – alone will never solve the problem of poverty there either.

But there's nothing like time in a rural village in Africa to make you at least a little bit uneasy with your own comfortable life.

When you actually get to know, even a little, the people in any place, it changes you. It often inspires generosity.

And, like listening to the needs in any community it also helps you know what might actually help.

When we were in Tanzania the person leading us on a hospital tour told about another group he led. That group was struck by the fact that all the hospital laundry was done by hand and hung on bushes to dry.

They bought and shipped a large commercial washer and dryer to be used by the hospital staff. Only thing is, electricity is not reliable enough there to run a washer and dryer. They were being used for storage. Generous gift, but one given out of ignorance of the issues facing people there.

It's easy to feel like what we can do is so little it's not worth trying. 106 pairs of shoes won't solve the problems in Ruhango where Patrick's students live. But it will help a lot as these kids walk their way to school and a better future.

When you look at the whole list of fruits of the spirit, you'll notice that they are all ways that we impact others. They're about relationships...community. What would society be like if even all Christians bore the fruit of the Spirit?

But sometimes we don't. Sometimes our hearts close down and we just can't. What keeps us from letting the Spirit work generosity – and the other fruits – in us?

Often, with generosity, we're afraid of not having enough. We're afraid if we're too generous with money, there won't be enough for us. Or we're not generous with our time because we worry about burnout.

Or we worry about enabling someone. Or we see the systemic problems that contribute to need and wonder if our generosity might actually make things worse.

Those can be legitimate concerns. There is an element of discernment when it comes to generosity. But part of that discernment is listening to what the Spirit might be calling you to do and trusting that it's right. It's also trusting in God's abundance. Trusting that we can be generous and have enough.

This isn't mostly about "you should." But being generous because we think we should can be a starting point. It might raise our awareness. Then we pray, we reflect, we become aware of our own feelings and the impact our generosity has on others. Gradually, we may find ourselves more able to get out of the way and just let the Spirit work.

Assignment - Stories: Times you've been spontaneously generous – didn't think twice and knew it was right. Or a time when you were reluctant to but found yourself surprisingly moved.

Congregation generosity – have people list

- Synod
- LWR – floods
- Saunders food pantry
- Beds for immigrant families
- Tuition for two boys two years in Tanzania
- Backpack program
- Saunders ministerial emergency fund
- LWR kits
- Oaks
- World Hunger
- Camp scholarships
- Davey Park
- LFP/Produce

Finish with a short time of meditation on generosity -