



DATE: August 17, 2008

TEXT: Galatians 5:22-25

TITLE: "Fruits of the Spirit VII: Gentleness"

I am continuing our sermon series on the Fruit of the Spirit this morning. This next fruit of the spirit mentioned in our text in Galatians is gentleness. The King James Bible uses the word meekness. Other translations use the word humility or unselfishness. In other words a person who is mature in Christ... who is empowered by the Holy Spirit, has overcome their selfish nature.

Two weeks ago we used the story of Daniel as an example of integrity. This morning I want to use a parable of Jesus as an illustration of selfishness... and unselfishness. I want to share the parable of the Prodigal Son. It is found in Luke 15:12. Allow me to retell the story in my own words.

A family lived together on a prosperous farm... there was the father and his two sons. The younger son was unhappy. He felt the rules he had to live by were constricting. He felt his father was unreasonable in his demands. He hated the farm. He felt trapped. So he went to his

father and said.... **“Dad, you know that when you die I will inherit half this farm....dad, let’s say you are dead now and why don’t you give me my inheritance right away.”** The father knew that the son would remain miserable on the farm. In sadness and in pain he agreed to the sons request and gave him half his possessions.

The son took the money and went to town... literally and figuratively. He partied every night. Spent his money on alcohol, on gambling and on women.... until he ran out of money. He then went to work on a pig farm.... the lowest job you could have. The pay was so bad that he did not have enough money to eat. Finally one day he quote “came to his senses” and decided to return home. He rehearsed his lines as he walked home... **Father, I have sinned against you and heaven... I do not deserve to be your son... I will serve as a servant”**. His father sees his son returning home... he rushes out embraces him.... put his ring on his finger... declaring that he is his son.. And orders a great celebration to be held. The eldest so, when he hears that a celebration is to be held to honor his wondering brother is angry an refused to go to the celebration.

What we see in this story are the causes of selfishness. I want to share two causes...

Cause # 1 Selfishness is caused by the pursuit of the wrong goals. The younger son obviously pursued wrong goals. His goal was pleasure. His goal was “freedom” His goal was good times. He was totally selfish. He declared his father dead. He didn’t care how much pain that caused. He had goals that he wanted to pursue.

We see the same selfishness in our society. I grew up in the 60's and the 70"s. My generation had a name. It was called the “me generation” Young people in the 60's, in many ways were idealistic. There were demonstrations against poverty, against Vietnam, against segregation. Women were demanding more equality. It was a turbulent decade because idealism struggled against the status quo. But then the 60's turned into the 70's and the 80's. The protests diminished. The college campuses, that were the center of protest became quiet. The pursuit changed. No longer were young people out to change their world... they were out to make money. The most popular majors in the 60's were education and social work. The most popular college majors in the 70's and 80's were business and engineering. For almost 40 years now, with very minor exceptions, the economy has been booming. People have time and resources to pursue fun

and pleasure. We have become a society of prodigal sons. Eat, drink and be merry and then eat drink and be merrier. It is easy to pursue wrong goals and fall into the trap of selfishness.

We have looked at the societal level..let's look at the personal level. It is easy for us to pursue wrong goals and be selfish. Often I will get home and have a goal..... I just want to relax, watch some T.V. and do nothing for a while. My wife comes home from a long day at work. She says "Doug, will you start the grill and help set the table for dinner." Her request is contrary to my goal. Usually, but not always I will chose to help. Sometimes I will help but "with an attitude". Kim will ask "what's wrong with you" I will say "nothing". I can't say "I want to be selfish" Again and again we allow false, disobedient goals make us selfish.

Cause #2 A **second reason** for selfishness is false pride. We see this in the eldest son in the story of the prodigal son. He was the good boy. He was the one who stayed home and worked. He had his goals in life worked out... he was going to inherit the family business. He was going to walk the straight and narrow path. But he lacked one thing... love and compassion. He was glad when his younger brother left... he was just a pain anyway. He was proud of his

work and his future. His pride caused him to be selfish. *Proverbs 16* gives this truth

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.

There is a solution to selfishness. We need 3 things to overcome selfishness

Solution # 1 First there must be humility The prodigal “came to his senses.” He recognized his false goals. He was a broken man and turned to his Father for help. We need to recognize our own inadequateness. We need to turn to our heavenly Father for help. **James 4** states **“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”**

Have you noticed how hard it is to ask for help. Whether it is for direction is a car... or help because you marriage in on the rocks.... or help because the financial ends are not meeting... it is hard to ask for help. It injures our pride. We desire to be independent and self-sufficient. there is a basic problem. God did not create us to be independent.

Have you ever tried to use a circular saw independently.... without electricity. It can be done. You can take the blade out of the saw or you can lock the blade in place and use it like a regular saw. It doesn't work very well. It takes for ever to cut something.... but you can do it.

That is what we are trying to do. We were created to be people in need. We need our Lord. We need other people. So often we ignore this truth and we try to be independent. Husbands should “need” their wives. Friends should “need” their friends. We all “need” our church. You can not be a “independent” Christian. That is an oxymoron. We need each other. And overall.... we Need Jesus Christ. Life can not be full without him. Every false goal will be inadequate in the end. Money, pleasure, success, friends, all will fail. Only Jesus Christ. We need, in humility to recognize our need for others.

Solution # 2 The second way overcome selfishness is by serving others. *Philippians 2:35*

states..

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

As we serve other we discover that we can overcome selfishness.

I believe this is the path of Christian maturity. It is not through worship. We need worship as Christians... but worship by itself will not make us mature in Christ. It is not through Bible

reading. We need to read the Word of God on a regular daily basis. But reading the Bible will give us more knowledge..... not necessarily maturity. We need to be part of a Bible study and Sunday School. We need the support of our fellow Christians. But again I have known people who have gone to Sunday school of 50 years and have not been mature in Christ... they demonstrated little of the fruits of the Spirit in the life. The path of Christian maturity.... the path to overcoming selfishness is by serving other.

Our deacons regularly visit our shut ins. It is our deacons who are growing in the Lord. We have a great team of Sunday School teachers. It is our Sunday School teachers that are growing in their faith.

We have more needs in our church. We need a ministry to our single senior citizens. We need people to serve in this ministry. We need workers for our youth groups. We need people to serve. As we begin our fall programs we need you. It is the only way to overcome selfishness. It is the only way to mature in faith... the path of servanthood.

Finally Solution # 3 there is one other necessary step to overcome selfishness. We need to

“live by the Spirit” *Galatians 5:16* states.....

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

What does it mean to live by the spirit? It means being aware that Christ is present at all times and in all places. When you desire to pursue false goals... goals of laziness... goals of selfishness... realize the Lord is present. He gives power to overcome false goals. He gives joy in his presence. We are to “Live by the Spirit”

To live a full life in Christ we need to overcome our selfishness. We need humility. We need gentleness. We need Christ

AMEN