

## COLLECTIVE

# Life in the Spirit Series (Lesson 14)

## Fruit of the Spirit – Goodness

Our connect group lessons this year will focus primarily on Galatians 5.

In our previous lessons, we learnt about Love, Joy, Peace, Patience and Kindness. In this lesson, we begin our study on the 6<sup>th</sup> Fruit of the Spirit – Goodness.

### Read: Galatians 5:16-25

Paul puts kindness and goodness together, and of course they have a lot in common. One thing that the Bible often associates with both goodness and kindness is generosity. Jesus told a story about a vineyard owner who employed men to work in his vineyard. Some worked all day and got their one-day's wages. Others had been employed only for the last hour or two of the day, but the owner gave them a whole day's wages too. The earlier workers complained it wasn't fair, but the owner said to them, "Are you envious because I am generous?" (Matthew 20:15).

And the word Jesus used there is the same as the one Paul uses — "good." Jesus is saying that good people don't always worry about what is strictly fair, but rather like to err on the side of generosity and kindness. It was not the men's fault that they had been hired only toward the end of the day. And they needed a day's wage to be able to buy food for their families. So, the owner chooses to be good (generous) towards their needs, rather than strictly fair in relation to all the workers and pay them only a fraction of what the others got.

When we associate the word "good" with a title or function (for example a good parent, or a good teacher, or a good police officer, or a good doctor), we sometime mean not only that the person is "good at" something (competent), but also that the person knows how to go beyond the strict limits of what the role demands and acts with some grace and generosity of spirit as well, "out of the goodness of the heart," as we sometimes say.

But what lies at the heart of "goodness"? What quality do we see in someone when we say "he is a really good man," or "she is a really good woman"?

One key thing would be integrity — an absence of any kind of guile or deception. Truly good people are "What You See Is What You Get". They are in reality all they appear to be. Their words and behaviour on the outside matches what is going on inside. There is no sham or pretence. When they do good, it is not just some kind of play acting to get a good name, or a good photo-op, or a good sound bite.

Good people do what they do simply because it is the right thing to do. Goodness is close to what it means to be "pure in heart." Goodness has a transparent quality. Most simply, you can depend on good people to be and do what they say (they keep their word) — and to do what is right (simply because it is the right thing to do).

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Jesus “Went Around Doing Good”. That is how Peter described Jesus to Cornelius and his family (Acts 10:38). It doesn’t mean that Jesus only did a lot of kind and caring things for people (of course he did). It also means that Jesus did what was right. Jesus did what he knew God his Father wanted him to do, even when he could have chosen an easy way out. Jesus was a man of goodness, seen in his righteous integrity. He refused to deviate from what he knew was the Father’s will for him.

Think of the number of times Jesus was offered an alternative — an easy way out — or when he faced the choice of taking a different route than the way of the cross.

- The devil tempted him three times to take an easier route — through popularity, or spectacular death-defying stunts, or political power. But Jesus resisted and chose the path of the suffering servant and the obedient Son — the identity that his Father had affirmed at his baptism.
- Simon Peter tried to deflect him away from the whole idea of suffering and crucifixion. But Jesus rebuked him.
- His beloved mother and brothers tried to get him to come home and give up his embarrassing and risky public ministry. But Jesus claimed that his true mother and brothers and sisters were those who did the will of his Father.
- In the Garden of Gethsemane, he longed desperately for any other option than what lay ahead of him the next day. But he chose to do the Father’s will.
- When they arrested him, he knew he could have called on a legion of angels to rescue him, but he did not.
- Even Pontius Pilate dangled the possibility of release before Jesus, when he was staring the cross in the face. But Jesus refused.

So, through all these temptations and diversions, Jesus demonstrated his “goodness” through his integrity and determination to do what was right, to do the will of his Father. He was, as Paul said, “obedient to death” (Philippians 2:8).

So, the goodness of God is seen in the goodness of Jesus, and that is why this too is fruit of the Spirit. Goodness comes from the life of God within us. What Jesus did came from who Jesus was in his own heart and mind and motives. Goodness is a heart thing. It comes from inside. What we are on the outside is like “fruit,” and fruit is the evidence of what is going on inside — the nature of the tree itself.

Here’s how Jesus makes this point very clearly:

No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit... A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. (Luke 6:43-45)

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What we do shows what we are. Our actions (on the outside) show what (or rather who) is on the inside. So, if Christ, through his Holy Spirit, takes up residence in our lives, then more and more we begin to show the character of Jesus in the way we think, speak, and act. Not that we are ever perfect (in this life), but the fruit begins to grow.

### **Reflection/Discussion:**

- 1) How can we cultivate the fruit of goodness in our daily lives, especially in the public world of our work and in all our social relationships?**
- 2) Have you ever had times where you had to choose to do what is good and right, even when it was hard and costly?**