

How Good Is Good Enough?

On Sunday we continued to explore what “life in the Spirit” looks like, focusing on another core characteristic of a Spirit-filled life – captured in the Greek word *agathosune* [ah-GATHO-sue-nay].

1. Warm-up Question: In a Calvin and Hobbes comic strip, Calvin finds himself worrying whether he’s been good enough to get lots of Christmas presents. He’s proud of the fact that he hasn’t killed anyone, started any wars, or committed any felonies. Hobbes says, “But what if being good is more than the absence of bad?” When you were a kid, did you ever worry about being good enough to get Christmas presents? How did you define “good”?
2. In Galatians 5:18, the Apostle Paul says, “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law,” by which he means religious rules. For many of us that’s a challenging statement because we’ve been taught that keeping the rules is the essence of goodness. *Thou shalt not bear false witness. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not covet. Thou shalt not put catsup on anything but a sandwich.*
 - a. Ok, let’s get real. Is it EVER appropriate to put catsup on anything but a sandwich?
 - b. All kidding aside, as you look back over your spiritual background, do you feel you were taught religion as rule keeping? If so, how did that affect you? What’s the danger in religion as rule keeping?
 - c. Why is it better to live by values (i.e., the fruit of the Spirit), than by rules?
 - d. Jeff said, “There are lots of things we shouldn’t do because they’re bad for us and others. But the absence of bad does not equal good. At best it only makes us neutral.” Critique that statement. Do you agree or disagree – and why?
 - e. Jeff gave the example of a church in Germany during the Nazi era that tried to sing loud enough to drown out the passing trains loaded with Jews. We wouldn’t call those Christians good because they were keeping the Ten Commandments. At best they were shockingly indifferent. In your own life, when have you found yourself tempted to look the other way in the face of suffering or evil?
3. Instead of religion as rule keeping, we who follow Jesus are called to live by certain high values that set the tone for life and guide us to do the right thing. We find the strength to do that through the Holy Spirit – the Life Force of God within us, nurtured and cultivated to overflowing. That’s what Paul calls the “Spirit-filled life.” There are nine core characteristics of the Spirit-filled life. On Sunday we studied the seventh characteristic – *agathosune* [ah-GATHO-sue-nay].
 - a. The King James Version translates *agathosune* as “goodness.” The New Revised Standard version translates it as “generosity.” Actually, we need both words to

get as close as possible to the meaning of the original Greek. *Agathosune* means extravagantly generous, proactive goodness. Can you recall an instance in your life when someone showed you *agathosune*?

- b. Jesus is the ultimate example of *agathosune*. Read John 10:11-18.
 - c. The hired hand in this passage is not a bad person. He did his job, looked after the sheep, didn't harm any of them, and probably even tried to turn back the wolf before fleeing for his own life. What's the difference between the hired hand and the good shepherd? According to this passage, what is it about the shepherd that makes him "good"?
 - d. Theologian James Edwards says, "[Here's] the heart of the Gospel story. We were trapped, but in the person and presence of Jesus, God was lowered into the abyss of our sin and suffering. In Jesus God became a tiny human being dangling between heaven and hell. He did it to save the people trapped below—you and me. The gospel is . . . the story of God's risky, costly, sacrificial rescue effort on our behalf." Why do you think Jesus chose to face the cross, rather than try to escape? How do you imagine Jesus felt while on the cross?
4. We are called to be like Jesus. We're supposed to be the kind of people who engage in crazy, radical, contagious acts of goodness. Like the joke Jeff told on Sunday about the battery and jumper cables, we're supposed to be the kind of people who are trying to start something, to spark something, through random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty.
- a. Gordon MacDonald tells a story about a time on a plane when he saw a complete stranger patiently help a young mother with a child who was crying, sick to her stomach, and had diarrhea running out of her loose diaper, creating a huge stench. While Gordon sat there annoyed, the stranger went to heroic lengths to help. Tell us about a time when you were able to engage in an act of *agathosune* and it felt like the light of God shined through you. How did it make you feel?
 - b. Tell us about a time when you had a chance to engage in *agathosune*, but instead acted more like Gordon MacDonald and held back. How did that feel?
 - c. Read Acts 4:31. Where/how do we find the strength to engage in more *agathosune*?
 - d. Sunday's sermon closed with a 2-minute short film about a little boy who went searching for God. He found her in the form of a homeless woman on a park bench. He shared snacks from his backpack. They laughed and talked. Then she went off to share his light with others. What feelings, thoughts, or insights did you get from the film?

Jesus said, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16.