

The Grit of Greatness

On Sunday we continued to explore what “life in the Spirit” looks like, focusing on the 8th core characteristic of a Spirit-filled life – captured in the Greek word *pistis* [piss-tis].

1. Warm-up Question: For many of us, summer is the best time of year. What’s one of your favorite summertime things to do?
2. Read what Jesus says in Matthew 7:15-20. In this passage, Jesus is specifically talking about how to identify false prophets. But what he says here has broad application to all of us.
 - a. Look again at verse 20. What’s the core principle here? How does it apply to false prophets? How does it apply to all of us?
 - b. There’s an old saying that goes like this: “If you were arrested and accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” Think of someone you’ve known who was a beautiful Christian. If you were trying to convince a jury they were Christian, what story about them would be Exhibit A?
3. In Galatians, the Apostle Paul identifies 9 core characteristics of Spirit-filled Christians that he calls “the fruit of the Spirit.” This week we are focusing on the 8th characteristic. In Galatians 5:22, Paul says, “The fruit of the Spirit is . . . *pistis*.” *Pistis* is often translated into English as “faithfulness.” In Greek lexicons, it’s defined as: the conviction of the truth of anything, generally with the included idea of holy fervor born of faith and joined with it. So, in short, **pistis means tenacious commitment to a deep conviction.**
 - a. On Sunday we watched the story of Jennifer Bricker, whose life is a living, breathing example of what *pistis* looks like. If any haven’t seen Sunday’s sermon, have someone share Jennifer’s story. (Or you can watch it again at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXCn4lOyFK4>.)
 - b. When you saw Jennifer’s story, what thoughts or feelings arose within you? How would you describe what Jennifer teaches us about what *pistis* means?
 - c. Can you think of a time in your life when you exhibited great *pistis*?
4. In the balance of Sunday’s sermon, we tried to imagine what it might look like for us to live with great *pistis*. Jeff offered three suggestions. **First, a Spirit-filled person is tenaciously committed to what God calls them to do.** You might call this “spiritual faithfulness.” When we sense God calling us to do something, we do it with all our might. For example, read First Kings 18:41-46.
 - a. How do you think Elijah felt the sixth time his servant returned to say, “There’s nothing there”? What would have happened if Elijah had become discouraged and quit?

- b. How do you think Elijah felt the seventh time when the servant returned and describe a small cloud the size of a person's hand?
 - c. Jeff shared the story of Andrea Platt, who has been preparing his sermon slides every week for 18 years without interruption because that's what she feels called to do. When in your life have you ever felt called to do something that really took a lot of grit to see through?
5. **Second, a Spirit-filled person is tenaciously committed to the people in their life.** To illustrate the point Jeff told the story of his wayward cat, Mr. Boy. Even after he began spraying, Jeff and David kept him for the remaining 20 years of his life, because that's what God does for us. In the beginning, humanity (Adam and Eve) rebelled against God, but God didn't give up on us. In the wilderness, Israel rebelled, but God didn't give up on them. Later, as a nation, Israel rebelled again, but God didn't give up. Ultimately, God sent Jesus, the only begotten Son, and we killed him. Even then, God didn't give up on us.
- a. II Timothy 2:13 says, "If we are unfaithful, God remains faithful, for God cannot deny the essence of Godself." What do you think that means?
 - b. Have you ever seen someone display great faithfulness toward a person who "didn't deserve it"? What happened?
 - c. Jeff said, "Faithfulness doesn't mean we never have to separate from someone or maybe even divorce someone. But even when we've got to give them their space, we don't have to give up on them." Do you agree or disagree? In your view, under what circumstances is it appropriate for a person filled with *pistis* to separate from someone or to divorce?
6. Third, a Spirit-filled person is tenaciously committed to justice. Jeff suggested that a deep commitment to justice often begins with listening to people whose experiences are different from our own. James 1:19 says, "Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger."
- a. Let's practice deep listening. After George Floyd's death, Jeff asked Pastoral staff to share their thoughts. Read Pastor Vivian's response on p. 3. Without jumping into the "yes, but" mode, what do you hear her saying?
 - b. Suppose a police officer in our congregation says, "I'm so sad because I do everything in my power to be a good cop and protect people, then a bad cop does something, and I get lumped in with them." Without jumping into the "yes, but" mode, what do you hear that officer saying?
 - c. Read Dr. Bernard Richard's parable on p. 3. Without jumping into the "yes, but" mode, what do you hear him saying?
 - d. Given what our nation is facing, what do you think it means to exhibit *pistis* in pursuit of justice?

Pastor Vivian's Thoughts About the Killing of George Floyd

“I have mourned too many deaths. What protestors are feeling is a rage and a fury over the systematic extermination of black men. OMG, don't jog while black, don't bird watch while black, don't live while black. Are the people the police have killed without sin (couldn't think of a better word)? No, but none required deadly force when arrested. Especially when police can arrest white murders and they're not harmed. It bothers me that armed white men can enter a state capital building without the police getting upset. But black people peacefully protesting are met with tear gas and rubber bullets. Of course they rioted, what were they supposed to do? Go home and say, 'Oh well we tried.' I am still so angry I'm not sure I'm the one to ask.”

Dr. Richard's Parable

Suppose a boy in school keeps getting punched by bullies. He says to his teacher, “They keep hitting me.” His teacher says, “It probably won't happen again, Joey. Just keep your head down and mind your own business. Don't do anything provocative and you'll be ok.”

But the bullies keep attacking him. He kept telling the teacher, but she kept doing nothing. So one day when he was attacked, Joey finally lashed out and punched back. The teacher caught him in the act. She was upset. “Joey,” she said, “why do you have to be so violent? Why are you so angry?” And she punished him.