

Sandra Brown  
*Fruit-full: Generosity*  
Acts 2:1-21; Galatians 5:22-23  
Pentecost Sunday, June 9, 2019

Welcome to week number 6 of our 9-week series on the fruit of the Spirit. We've been taking an in-depth look at each of the different qualities in this list of spiritual "fruit," and as we've done this, we've emphasized several things: first, that the fruit of the Spirit is not a checklist of tasks we are to work on, but rather, qualities that result from the Spirit working in our lives; second, we all have within us the seeds of all of these qualities, and all of the qualities are interconnected; third, the list is given to us as a tool for discernment. How can you tell that God has been working in someone's life? Look at the fruit.

So far we've covered love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness. Here's where things start to get a little interesting. In just about every version of the Bible, those first five items on the list are the same: love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness. But the next word is not. When I was a kid, I memorized scripture out of the Good News translation of the Bible, which goes, "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, GOODNESS." So does the New International Version, the King James, the Common English Bible, and a number of other translations. The NRSV, which stands for "New Revised Standard Version," which is still the most accurate, scholarly translation available to us, uses the word GENEROSITY. Our pew Bibles are NRSV, so generosity is the word we will use, too. But it suggests that goodness and generosity are very closely related, if not in fact the same thing.

When we think about that word, "generosity," I hope you have the same experience I did this past week. As I reflected on generosity, I was flooded with memories of people who have shown generosity to me, especially one in particular. Our Director of Communications, Taylor

Forrest, is expecting a baby next month, and perhaps that's why I keep remembering the time I was expecting my first baby. I was living in Southern California, and I hit that point in pregnancy where your normal clothes stop fitting well, and my mother-in-law, Maxine, said to me, "Sandra, let's go shopping." So we went to this little boutique and she had me pick out all these amazingly beautiful, flowing rayon batik-printed dresses from Indonesia, which were so comfortable and so stunning that I actually mourned when I had to put them away after having Madeleine. This was not our first shopping trip, nor our last, but that one it stands out because I remember at one point realizing that Maxine was dropping about a thousand dollars on me, for clothes that I would only wear for a short time. This was unfamiliar territory for me.

While I was still marveling at the bounty I had been given, we made a stop in a shoe department. Maxine saw me eyeing some leopard-print, kitten-heeled suede open-toed mules, flecked with gold, which no expecting mother could possibly need. "Do you like those, Sandra?" she asked. "I do," I replied, "But I don't need them." "Well, you like them, so you need them," she said, and added them to the sizable pile we already had at the cash register.

"If you want it, you need it" is probably not a good rule for personal finance. But Maxine had grown up on a peanut farm in Oklahoma with ten sisters and two brothers, and when they were kids, she remembers that things were so tough that her mother always served meals to her father first, before feeding the children, to make sure her father would have enough strength to work the farm. When Maxine became prosperous later in life, she found great joy in being materially generous with people. And I found great joy in being one of her recipients. I had been an awkward teenager, and always felt like I fell short a bit when it came to clothes. There was something life-changing about Maxine's generosity towards me, almost like having a fairy godmother. (And I will treasure the memory of those shoes . . .)

When I think of other generous gifts that have made a deep impact, I think of all the stories my dad told and read to me and my brother, all the trips to the library, all the piano lessons my mom drove me to. I think of all the Tuesday afternoons in the mid 1980's when our youth pastor, Alecia, would take me out for a soda after school, to encourage me in my teenage struggles, and I think of the patient way my husband Rod always stops what he's doing and listens to me with great grace when I need to process something.

Last week, one of our members alerted us that photos of our church were featured prominently inside and on the cover of the June issue of the Journal of the Kansas Bar Association, which would normally be great. But the article attached to these photos was titled, "Debt Among the Faithful: Churches, Lenders & Troubled Loans in Kansas." The irony being, our church has no debt of any kind, not even a mortgage.

The main reason for that is the generosity of our members. You not only give money, but a bunch of you give or have given your time and talent in ways I can barely fathom. Not just here, but all over the place. I've seen some of your names on buildings out and about, because you've given your treasure. There are beloved brothers and sisters in Christ who are in worship with us today because you have given of your time to drive someone to church. There are relationships filled with grace, because you have had the generosity of spirit to forgive the thoughtless thing someone did or said. There is nothing sweeter than humans showing generosity to one another, which is why ripe berries represent generosity for us today.

But just as there are pests that can destroy a berry patch, there are pests that can ruin a good harvest of generosity. See if any of these have threatened your own ability to produce generosity.

The first pest is comparing ourselves with others. When we look around and think, those other people have it better than I do. More financial security, more professional success, happier relationships, fewer problems, more friends, better health, more fun, less stress. If I had their time, if I had their resources, their level of support from family, I could easily be more generous. But when I look at them, what I have doesn't feel like enough.

Have thoughts like that ever pestered you?

The second pest is giving with one or more strings attached. I can't tell you how many times I've done something that looked generous, and selfless, but deep down inside, I just wanted to look good. It's not a terrible thing to want to be appreciated, but neither is it true generosity.

The third, and most destructive pest, is fear. It's hard to be generous, whether it's with time, money, affection, or anything else, if we're afraid we'll run out. If we're afraid there is not enough.

Here's where the story of Pentecost is so appropriate. I've pointed this out before, and I'm sure I'll do it again. One of the most exciting things in the story of Pentecost isn't the violent wind, or the tongues of fire. It's the word "all." All the believers were together. The Holy Spirit came to all, not just some. The Spirit *gave* ALL of them the ability to speak in other languages, so that ALL of the bystanders from ALL of the different nations could understand them. ALL were included. NONE were left out.

Then, when Peter is explaining what all of this means, he cites the prophet Joel, saying: "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will POUR OUT MY SPIRIT (caps mine) upon ALL flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in

those days, I will pour out my Spirit: and they shall prophesy.” Did you hear that? Every age, every stage, every status of person—God’s Spirit poured out on ALL of them. Not just the smart, or the deserving, but all of them.

I love that word, “pour,” p-o-u-r. God doesn’t do dribbles and drops. God POURS. When Jesus was walking around on the earth, he changed water into wine, not just enough to finish out the wedding, but something like 90 gallons worth of wine. He made Peter and his partners catch so many fish it broke their nets. And when he fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish, there were how many baskets of leftovers?

There’s a certain divine wisdom in POURING. Dribbles and drops don’t make sense, when you can pour. (I think that’s why Maxine shopped with me the way she did, and why there is something sacred about those trips in my memories, all these years later.)

There’s that wonderful story of the time Jesus was teaching his disciples about prayer, and said, “Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Pentecost is the great reminder that when it comes to the precious gift of the Holy Spirit, we all have enough. We’ve been poured into. None of us is left out or overlooked. In this life, we may have more or less money than others, and more or less hardships, illnesses, and opportunities; but when it comes to God’s own Spirit, we each have plenty, and plenty of ways to share.

Last Sunday, when we talked about kindness, I challenged us to find a new way to express kindness every day this past week. I don't know about you, but I found that I had one or two really good days, where I did this well, and the rest, not so much—I'd get busy and forget.

This week, I offer a question: what can we use as a repellent for the pests that threaten generosity? What drives those pests—comparisons, strings, and fear—away, so that generosity, a.k.a. goodness, can flourish, like a berry patch full of ripe, juicy blueberries and raspberries? I'd love to hear your answers in the coming week.