



## **FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT**

**1 August 2021**

### **JOY & GENEROSITY**

#### **JOY**

##### **Luke 15:20-24**

*This passage is the climax of Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son. This younger son has insulted his father, taken much of his wealth and spent it on wild living. In his humiliation, he has realised how much better off he would be even as his father's slave.*

Jesus continued, <sup>20</sup> 'So the son got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms round him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> 'The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'" So they began to celebrate.'

At the start of this parable it may appear to have more to do with self-indulgence (the son) and sorrow (the father) than with joy. But the climax is a great feast when the son returns and the family is reunited. It is a human example of Jesus' teaching that *there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent* (Luke 15:7). The resentment of the elder brother, understandable though it is, excludes him from the celebration.

Return, repentance and reconciliation leading to joy are important ideas in the OT (see eg Isaiah 35:10). Reconciliation is a characteristic both of God himself and of Jesus, and for this reason Paul reminds us that Christians are called to be *Christ's ambassadors* of reconciliation to the world (see 2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

For Paul, 'life in Christ, and therefore life by the Spirit, is a life of joy; such joy is to characterize the Christian community above all else (1 Thess 5:16) ... the presence or absence of joy is quite unrelated to one's circumstances ... the Pauline imperative is not simply "rejoice", but "rejoice in the Lord". (Fee p448).

- When do we experience joy like the father's in the parable?

- When do we experience joy like the prodigal son's?
- What is the difference between these two kinds of joy?
- How might we be Christ's ambassadors of reconciliation - as individuals? - as a church community?
- What stands in our way of being joyful in the Lord?

## **GENEROSITY**

### **Acts 2:42-47**

*In this passage from early in the Acts of the Apostles, we hear about the Christian fellowship in Jerusalem, shortly after Pentecost.*

<sup>42</sup> The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Some English translations have *goodness* instead of *generosity*. Although in English the two words have rather different meanings - generosity as relating principally to an action, specifically giving money away; goodness as a moral attribute - a closer look at the original Greek word puts these meanings much closer together. First, in the OT the word is applied to God - who is both good and generous. Secondly generosity is not to be restricted to money alone but to an attitude of heart, embracing skills, time, money, everything that we are; such generosity would take us very close to goodness. From the opposite direction, goodness as an attribute which doesn't emerge in tangible actions such as generosity seems to be no goodness at all.

In Acts 2, generosity is a hallmark of the church as a whole and of individual believers, accorded a very high priority - see the cautionary tale of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-10. It helped make the church attractive to those outside (v47). Elsewhere Paul commends the attitude of the Christians at Corinth (*I know your eagerness to help*), and encourages them to *sow generously, reap generously*. All this is a reflection of God's own generosity (see 2 Corinthians 9:6-15).

- What does it mean for us to be generous with *ourselves*? How does this relate to skills, time and money?
- In what ways should our church be closer to the description in Acts? How realistic is that?

Quotation from Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, Hendrickson Publishers, 1994. Other ideas from BRF Guidelines May 2013 p111, 116 written by Janet Fletcher.