We have been taking a look at the Fruit of the Spirit, and asking how can we live our lives on the vine, connected to Jesus and producing these fruits. So far we have made it all the way to goodness. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and goodness. So if you are paying attention to Paul’s list here you might be asking, what is the difference between kindness and goodness? They seem quite synonymous.

If you think that, you would be right. In all honesty, when Paul sat down to write his letter to the Galatians, he compiled a list of qualities that the Spirit works within us, and if you read the passage, you will see that Paul writes this list as a contrast to another list that describes the desires of the flesh. So it is not as though Paul was trying to produce a list for some pastor to use as a sermon series someday. Part of the strength of his point is made in the culmination of these nine qualities, or fruits, that he mentions.

Nevertheless, it is good for us and instructive to analyze Paul’s list because, though it was not written as a structured table of contents, it is still a list inspired by the Holy Spirit himself and is therefore a good guide for our lives.

So a fair amount of crossover within these nine fruits is to be expected. Especially since, as we discussed, all of the fruits are ultimately rooted in love. If we are getting love right, living other-directed with our focus off of ourselves, then we are on track to developing the rest of these fruits in out lives.

Last week we discussed kindness. We said in a world that values self-sufficiency, kindness can be a tough thing to accept from others, and if it is hard to accept from others, it is hard to accept from God. Kindness’s ultimate goal is to lead us to repentance…life change…transformation. So the best way to experience the give and take of kindness, and open ourselves to that transformation is by joing up with a grow group and by becoming involved with our Wednesday night ministry called ECHO. Kindness reminds us that we need each other.

Goodness is related, of course, but for us, it is such a generic word. It does not seem to hold much weight. but the lie that opposes goodness is slightly different and more sinister actually. When uit comes to kindness, we are taught that we shouldn’t need the kindness from others. We should be self-sufficient and able to take care of ourselves. But this lie is carried even further by saying that not only should you be able to take of yourself, but that you are able, within yourself, by your own powers and abilities. You are equipped, within yourself, to tackle this life alone…it’s all up to you…you can do it…it’s the idea of self-help.

Self-help is a booming industry. You can find books and videos and go to seminars that seek to unlock the potential that is within you. You can live a better life, the good life! All you need is this new program or this new insight or this new habit…But what is the good life? What is a good person? If I say this is a good guitar, then at the same time, I am saying something about the purpose of this guitar. It’s purpose is to play music and produce a certain tone. People also like a guitar that looks good. So it has some sleek design and cool wood patterns. This particular guitar stays in tune pretty well, it’s tone is okay, but it is easy to play. Plus it looks really cool and is made by a well-known company. I also bought it during a black Friday sale, so the price was right. Given all those factors, I can say that this is a good guitar. It’s pretty easy to point out the purpose of a guitar.

But what about a person? Am I a good person because I don’t break any laws. Am I good person because I go out of my way to help others? Am I a good person because I am a pastor? Am I a good person because I…fill in the blank. What makes a person good?

It’s a bit of a trick question. Let’s take a look at Luke 18:18 and break it down:

**A certain ruler asked Jesus, “Good teacher, what must I do to obtain eternal life?”**

So let’s make sure we understand what is going on here. We have a ruler of some sort…we don’t know of what but we can surmise that is has some wealth and some influence and is probably doing pretty well. He approaches Jesus, whom he understands to be, not the Son of God or divine, but rather a good teacher. So what makes Jesus a good teacher? I think probably this ruler had heard about Jesus’ reputation, Jesus spoke with an authority that others rabbis did not seem to posses. So surely, by these standards, Jesus must be considered a good teacher. So this ruler approaches this good teacher with an all important question. What must *I* do to obtain eternal life? So notice, this ruler is basically looking to Jesus for some self-help methods isn’t he?

Well, Jesus, as usual, instead of answering the question outright, turns to the ruler and asks him his own question: **Why do you call me good?** Well, we kind of already established this Jesus. You are a well-known teacher. You speak of things that are difficult to understand, you have a way about you that makes people want to listen…etc, etc. All of these characteristics are earthly categories aren’t they. Jesus elevates the discussion. He says: **No one is good except the one God.** SO Jesus sets us all straight here. Do not think of an earthly teacher as good. Do not think of yourself as good. Do not think of anyone as good. Only God alone is good. Wow. That is a bit of a pill to swallow. Jesus goes on: **You know the commandments. Don’t commit adultery. Don’t murder. Don’t steal. Don’t give false testimony. Honoer you father and mother.”** Jesus hits on some Old Testament highlights here, things that would be basic to anyone at all familiar with Judaism. So the ruler responds, **“I have kept all of these things since I was a boy.”** In other words, that’s old hat Jesus. Give me something new, a piece of information that I had not known before, something that will change my life…my eternal life! **“There’s one more thing...”** Jesus almost adds as an afterthought. **Sell everything you own and distribute the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me.”** Well, here is your life changing answer! Here is the new thing that you had asked for. But, **when he heard these words, the man became sad because he was extremely rich.** So maybe this ruler did not really want an answer to his question. Maybe he thought obtaining eternal life would be a bit easier than having to sell his possessions. What is really going on here is that this ruler is coming before Jesus in self-righteousness. He comes professing his own goodness. ‘I have followed all these commands for years…Being good is easy for me. I know I am good so eternal life must not be far from me. Jesus was less than impressed with the piety of this ruler.

Let’s take a gander at another episode from the life of Jesus, this one occurs at the end. We’ll stay in the book of Luke and turn to chapter 23. Verse 32 tells us that Jesus was crucified at a place called the Skull along with two criminals. As these three men hang from the cross on misery and pain, one of these criminals pipes up, verse 39: **“Aren’t you the Christ?** This is interesting already. Because to the rule Jesus was another Rabbi, but this criminal makes a bit of a faith statement here. He rightly identifies who Jesus is, the chosen one of God. He goes on: “**Save yourself and us!”** Another interesting connection: both men, this criminal and the ruler, are looking for some sort of salvation. Before Jesus speaks, the second criminal responds to the first: **“Don’t you fear God, seeing that you’ve also been sentenced to die? We are rightly condemned, for we are receiving the approprioate sentence for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong.”** This criminal understands sin, he understands guilt, he knows the weight of it. He has been sentenced to die and rightly so…it is what he deserves. The key for us and for this ruler, is that we do not get what we deserve. And so we do not understand sin, we do not understand guilt. We waltz up to Jesus full of self-help and confidence and we wonder what we can do to obtain eternal life. The lack of understanding is contained in the question. What can you do to obtain eternal life? Nothing! You can do nothing! You have nothing to contribute to the quest of becoming perfect. You are helpless and hopeless and when we assert that we are not that way, we reveal all the more our status as lost.

The ruler walks away because he can’t imagine that he is not yet good enough for this eternal life thing. He was a good person! And this criminal…this bad person, what does he say to Jesus? **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”** Inother words, Jesus, look at me. I am hinging here because of my guilt. I have made this mess and I deserve this death. Jesus, I have nothing, not one thing to offer you . I have nothing I can use to make a deal with you or somehow convince you to accept me as one of your own. Jesus, I am doomed. I am lost. But if you would have me, if you would for whatever reason accept me, if you would take me as I am in all my wretchedness, I’d love to be a part of your kingdom.

And what does Jesus say? Does he ask him about his own personal wealth and how much he gave to the poor? Does he bring up any of the commandments? Does he go through any type of checklist? No, he says to this pathetic, deplorable, filthy criminal…this bad person: **“I assure you that today you will be with me in paradise.”** And I guarantee you, that man died an agonizing death with a smile on his face because he knew at that moment that his entire backlog of sin was no more. He had experienced forgiveness. He had encountered the one and only Good.

The ruler came into contact with Jesus, in much more favorable circumstances I might add, but he did not receive forgiveness. Why not? Because he came confessing his own goodness and not his own sin. He thought himself to be a good person, and by all accounts and by our standards he was! But our good, is not good enough.

All of us have sinned, all of us have fallen into a pit from which we cannot get out. We need a Savior, every day we need a Savior. How many of us have begged God to remember us in his kingdom. Please Lord, let me scoot in the back of the line. Please Lord, overlook my failings. It’s impossible that I could be loved by a holy God. It’s impossible that me life could be redeemed. Jesus says: Nothing is impossible for God. The sinner can be washed clean.

But in our self-help world, we look at ourselves and we don’t see all that much dirt. Maybe a little, maybe on my shoes. But I’ve never broken any laws (major ones), I don’t swear (out loud) and I go to church faithfully (when I am in town). I am pretty well put together, so heaven is not far from my grasp. I just have to think more positively and make sure I keep my goals clearly in mind.

Church, we cannot help ourselves out of this one. Psalm tells us there is none who are good, no not one. God alone is good. God alone.

I think we would all agree that it is best to live in reality. And the reality is, we are sinners, we fall short, but while we were sinners, Christ died for us. And we see from the Gospels, that even in his act of dying, even as he hung there on the cross, he was extending forgiveness, he was offering eternal life…

God is good, we are not, but we have access to his goodness. We have a direct line to the throne of grace. But we will get nowhere thinking that we can somehow earn this grace, we come like the thief on the cross, begging for mercy and what’s more, receiving it.

I want to encourage us as a church to acknowledge the reality of our sin, to come down and confess these sins before the Lord, acknowledge his goodness and experience his mercy which is new every morning.