We are in the sixth part of a series on Paul’s “fruit of the Spirit” in the letter to the Galatians, 5:22-23. Today we come to the fruit of generosity.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

Most of us have a retirement plan, a savings plan, a plan to pay for college or the weddings of our daughters. We have financial goals, maybe even a “Bucket List.” Any wise person knows you have to plan for all of that. Have you ever thought about having a Generosity Plan?

A friend of ours has one. He’s a Presbyterian minister, but along the way invested in rental properties. His goal was to build that investment up to 10 million dollars before he retired. At his death, he wants to be able to give 10 million dollars to the Presbyterian Church and to his alma mater, Presbyterian College. That’s a “Generosity Plan!”

Paul uses the metaphor of fruit when he is talking about the characteristics of God’s Spirit as a way of saying these traits are born in us. We don’t manufacture this stuff. If the Spirit of God dwells in you, then so do these things. Our job is to cultivate them. There could be no such thing as an “ungenerous Christian.” That’s an oxymoron. We cultivate the generosity of God that is within us.
Christian generosity flows from a heart that belongs to Christ. It’s more than charity. More than a tax break. More than needing to be recognized. It’s not about earning credit, but about expressing gratitude. **The sole motive of Christian generosity is always, and in every case, gratitude.** That’s it. Gratitude gives birth to generosity.

*Adam Hamilton, pastor of the Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, tells the story of his family’s camping trip to the Grand Tetons on his birthday. He gave each of their young daughters $20 spending money for the three days at Jackson Hole. One of his daughters went to the gift shop on the very first day, found a ball cap for $20, and wanted it. He tried to persuade her to forego the cap and spread her money over the three days, but to no avail. She spent her entire $20. Later that day they took a walk around the lake and found a great spot to watch the sun set. That’s when his daughter, Rebecca, handed him the cap and said, “Daddy, I bought this for you. I love you. Happy Birthday!” (Adam Hamilton, **Enough**, Abingdon Press, 2009, p. 87)**

What if we were so generous with God? Not calculated. Not a tax cut. No strings attached. Not a power play. Just pure generosity that flows from gratitude.

*When we see Paul’s word generosity in this list of fruit, many of us think of money. Some of us have more money than others. Those who don’t have much money often think those who do should be more generous! (That’s convenient!) Those who do have more money often feel “nibbled to death by ducks” from all the requests they receive for their money. They can feel used by people who try to manipulate them for their money.

When Paul uses the word generosity, he provides no qualifiers. He doesn’t say the rich person should be more generous. Nor does he say the poor are exempt from generosity. He simply implies that the Spirit of God is generous. If God’s Spirit dwells in me, then I share in the generosity of God. It’s not contingent on how much, or how little I have.

*Years ago, I was invited to conduct a chapel service for a nursing home in Norfolk, Virginia. The residents were classified as below poverty level. They came into the dining room for worship in wheelchairs, walkers, canes, with oxygen bottles, hearing aids and all the rest. I don’t remember much about the service, nor would they, but I do remember this.
As I stood at the door to shake hands and greet them, there was a woman in her bathrobe and bedroom slippers who shuffled up to me. Bent over with age, she grasped my hand and thanked me for the sermon and in her hand was a one-dollar bill.

I quickly told her that we were not taking an offering. Then she said, “Well, then, this is for you.” And she shuffled off! I didn’t even know her name. I was standing there with a dollar bill from a poor woman in an indigent nursing home.

The jacket I had on was worth hundreds of dollars. The car I drove was worth thousands. I felt guilty for taking her dollar, but it would have been condescending to give it back to her.

Figure the percentage of that dollar to her income and she likely gives more than most of us. That dollar bill is taped inside the back cover of my Bible to this day, reminding me of her generosity. She would never remember the sermon I preached that day, but I will never forget the gift. That was 35 years ago! Generosity has an ongoing ripple effect.

As we take communion together this morning, we are literally tasting the generosity of God. We consume it. We receive God’s grace, God’s forgiveness, God’s love poured out in Jesus Christ.

When we leave this Table, we are compelled to allow the spirit of generosity to flow through us. It spills out of a heart that belongs to Christ! The ripple-effect is unending!

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Congregation: Amen