

Story: Louise and the ogre

Louise worked for an ogre. She was PA to probably the most unreasonable boss in Buckinghamshire. He was bad-tempered, temperamental, indifferent to others, changeable. And she worked for the ogre for three years, prayed for strength, prayed that he would change, and prayed that he would become a follower of Jesus. But he didn't. And she felt like an abject failure. In the end, she decided that she couldn't take any more and she left, feeling like she'd let God down.

A few weeks later, she got a phone call from the woman who replaced her: 'He is impossible. I've been here three weeks and I'm already thinking of leaving. So I talked to a couple of people and they told me to give you a call. They said you'd done a fantastic job, that you'd always been gracious and upbeat, despite his impossible ways. How did you do it?'

Fruitfulness on the Frontline, Mark Greene (2014), IVP, p65-66

Life as a Christian?

- Louise asked herself: How did she do it?
- Maybe we ask ourselves as well – how do we do it?

- We live our lives as best as we can.
- But may feel disheartened, downtrodden, depressed
- or we may feel inferior, insecure, inadequate, guilty, worried or doubting.
- But is that true – or is this an image we project on ourselves?
- Because:
 - Inferior? You are a child of God seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph 2:6)
 - insecure? God will never leave you nor forsake you (Heb 13:5)
 - inadequate? You can do all things through Christ (Phil 4:13)
 - Guilty? There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Rom 8:1)
 - Worried? God has offered to trade His peace for your anxiety (Phil 4:6-7; 1 Peter 5:7; John 14:27)
 - Doubt? God provides wisdom for the asking (James 1:5)

Fruit of the Spirit

- How do other people see us? How does Jesus see us!?
 - We really do not like to ask.

- Yes, there are always things we can do better or be better at.
- But like Louise we do already exhibit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control
 - In very difficult times or circumstances.
- Paul called these characteristics the Fruit of the Spirit.
 - Other lists in the bible add other characteristics¹
- I don't think I need to explain them. We know instinctively what they are.
 - We also know instinctively if we do not exhibit these
- The reason is that they are the Fruit of the Spirit: **They are the result of the Holy Spirit living in us**
- And the Holy Spirit came to live in us when we accepted Jesus Christ as our saviour.
- So we need to encourage each other and highlight to each other when we demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit as we do not see it ourselves, like Louise.
- Mark Green in his book Fruitfulness on the Frontline says: "We are like dolphins being told

¹ Rom 5:3-5; Cor 13:4-7; Phil 4:8; Col 3:12-17; James 3:17; 1 Peter 3:8-9; 2 Peter 1:5-7

that we are good at swimming. It doesn't seem very remarkable, unless of course you are a lobster, a sea horse or a kangaroo”

- But it is still goof to know that as dolphins we swim well! So let's encourage each other!
- This is our Godly Character

Transformation by the Spirit

- So if we follow Jesus, the Spirit lives in us and we are starting to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit.
- But that does not mean everything happens automatically: we still have a role to play in our own sanctification process.
- Paul says it as follows: “Those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” v25
- Earlier Paul gives a list of acts that demonstrates our sinful nature: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies.
- All of these Paul calls the desires of our sinful nature or the flesh.
- In our sinful nature we look for self-preservation and self-gratification.

- But whenever we are engaged with these things we do not Love God above all or Love your neighbour as ourselves.
- And unfortunately in our lives as Christians we are constantly battling between our sinful nature and nature the Spirit of God wants to instil in us.
- So although the Holy Spirit lives in us – he is constantly battling to change our characters to make us Christ-like.
- And he needs our help: We need to crucify our sinful nature when we accept Jesus.
- This is strong language.
- This indicates a strong discipline from our part!

Two natures

- So there are these two natures that live in us.
- It is a bit like gardening:
- The fruit of the Spirit won't grow well if our patch is full of the weeds of our sinful nature.
- But the Spirit helps with weeding as well. He helps us to identify what need changing and he gives us the priority in what needs to go first.
- And often the priority is different for different people:
 - Some struggle most with addictions (drunkenness, orgies)

- Others with strong passions like anger, hate, jealousy, rage
- Others may struggle with sexual desires or sexual nature (sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery)
- Others again have strong ambitions (selfish ambitions)
- Others again grave for power in the group (discord, dissensions, factions and envy)
- And others have dual commitments: to Christ, but also to other gods: idolatry and witchcraft
- Paul calls us to crucify these in our lives as we follow Christ-like
- How do we do that? To give each of these sinful natures and put them on the Cross with Jesus. He has died so that we can be free of each of these. He welcomes you to nail them to his cross!

Freedom

- Paul says that we are called to be free (v13)
- But what is freedom
- Yes, to choose between good and evil
- Or in this case between receiving and growing the Fruit of the Spirit, or indulging in our sinful nature.
- The problem is that when we do the latter – we are not free any more. We are becoming slaves of

the evil one – tempting us to do evil and turning away from Christ.

- The list of actions of our sinful nature will keep us in slavery.
- And even though the world encourages a number of these things as freedoms they are in fact enslaving us
- True freedom is to live by the Spirit.
- Because if we choose to be led by the Spirit we are truly free

< Time of accepting the Holy Spirit and Crucifying our sinful natures >

Song: Holy Spirit Fall

Work in the Spirit

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Now that the Spirit in us has strengthened us, and we have started to crucify our sinful nature, we need to practice this.

Continually receive and encourage the fruit that the Spirit grows in us.

And Continually crucify, abolish, avoid doing the acts of sinful nature.

A gardener is never finished. And we are never finished: we need to keep weeding.

But God calls us not to practice these things in our safe spaces. Where it may be quite safe to do so. Where we can control the people we meet and the temptations we face.

God calls us to do this on our frontlines. He wants us to model Godly Character in those places where it is difficult. Where there are people we do not like and where there circumstances may not be as healthy as in church: at work, at the golf course, at the bowling green, in our families who do not accept Jesus.

This is where it is hard to model Godly Character and to keep the weeds at bay in our garden.

Let us pray together.