

This is our last Sunday on the fruit of the Spirit. Fruit number 9 which is self-control. And to look at why this is a fruit of the Spirit, we look at an account of David, before he became king, when he showed a good measure of self-control, This is found in First Samuel chapter 26.

## 1 Samuel 26

The Ziphites went to Saul at Gibeah and said, “Is not David hiding on the hill of Hakilah (Hach-heeela), which faces Jeshimon ?”<sup>2</sup> So Saul went down to the Desert of Ziph, with his three thousand select Israelite troops, to search there for David.<sup>3</sup> Saul made his camp beside the road on the hill of Hakilah facing Jeshimon, but David stayed in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul had followed him there,<sup>4</sup> he sent out scouts and learned that Saul had definitely arrived.<sup>5</sup> Then David set out and went to the place where Saul had camped. He saw where Saul and Abner son of Ner, the commander of the army, had lain down. Saul was lying inside the camp, with the army encamped around him.<sup>6</sup> David then asked Ahimelek the Hittite and Abishai son of Zeruiah, Joab’s brother, “Who will go down into the camp with me to Saul?” “I’ll go with you,” said Abishai.<sup>7</sup> So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him.<sup>8</sup> Abishai said to David, “Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I won’t strike him twice.”<sup>9</sup> But David said to Abishai, “Don’t destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD’s anointed and be guiltless?”<sup>10</sup> As surely as the LORD lives,” he said, “the LORD himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish.<sup>11</sup> But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD’s anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let’s go.”<sup>12</sup> So David took the spear and water jug near Saul’s head, and they left. No one saw or knew about it, nor did anyone wake up. They were all sleeping, because the LORD had put them into a deep sleep.<sup>13</sup> Then David crossed over to the other side and stood on top of the hill some distance away; there was a wide space between them.<sup>14</sup> He called out to the army and to Abner son of Ner, “Aren’t you going to answer me, Abner?” Abner replied, “Who are you who calls to the king?”<sup>15</sup> David said, “You’re a man, aren’t you? And who is like you in Israel? Why didn’t you guard your lord the king? Someone came to destroy your lord the king.<sup>16</sup> What you have done is not good. As surely as the LORD lives, you and your men must die, because you did not guard your master, the LORD’s anointed. Look around you. Where are the king’s spear and water jug that were near his head?”<sup>17</sup> Saul recognized David’s voice and said, “Is that your voice, David my son?” David replied, “Yes it is, my lord the king.”<sup>18</sup> And he added, “Why is my lord pursuing his servant? What have I done, and what wrong am I guilty of?”<sup>19</sup> Now let my lord the king listen to his servant’s words. If the LORD has incited you against me, then may he accept an offering. If, however, people have done it, may they be cursed before the LORD! They have driven me today from my share in the LORD’s inheritance and have said, ‘Go, serve other

gods.’ <sup>20</sup> Now do not let my blood fall to the ground far from the presence of the LORD. The king of Israel has come out to look for a flea—as one hunts a partridge in the mountains.”

<sup>21</sup> Then Saul said, “I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have been terribly wrong.” <sup>22</sup> “Here is the king’s spear,” David answered. “Let one of your young men come over and get it. <sup>23</sup> The LORD rewards everyone for their righteousness and faithfulness. The LORD delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the LORD’s anointed. <sup>24</sup> As surely as I valued your life today, so may the LORD value my life and deliver me from all trouble.” <sup>25</sup> Then Saul said to David, “May you be blessed, David my son; you will do great things and surely triumph.” So David went on his way, and Saul returned home.”

So just to recap what has happened, David has been told by God that he will be the next king. He knows it is going to happen. And Saul knows it too, and has been trying to kill David ever since he found out. And in this passage David has the opportunity to kill Saul, but he does not. Now to look at what self-control is, we need to address *what* it is that is being controlled. What are we controlling, or what is the opposite of self-control? Well, for the answer to that we need to look back at that Galatians 5 passage and the paragraph that precedes the one with the list of the fruit of the Spirit. That is why I included it as the responsive reading for this morning. In Galatians chapter 5 Paul is urging the Galatians to not live in the flesh. Or not give in to sinful desires, but rather live by the Spirit of God and bear the fruit of the Spirit. So before listing the fruit of the Spirit, Paul lists sinful desires that must have been an issue for them. Starting in verse 19 Paul writes this: “<sup>19</sup> The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.” I love how he puts “and the like” at the end. As if to say, and you fill in the rest of what you struggle with. So self-control is not behaving in these ways, not giving in to the temptation to sin in these ways. Well, if David had gone ahead and killed Saul, would it have been any of these things? Yes, it would have. Because killing Saul outside of a direct command by God would have been either out of anger for what Saul had already done to David, or it would have been out of selfish ambition to bring about becoming king sooner. And both anger and selfish ambition are in that list of sinful desires we just read.

Take a look at that list in your responsive reading. Which ones are a struggle for you? Or what would you fill in for “and the like?” All of us are sinners. So all of us have desires that we are challenged to control. Now I don’t want to turn this into a time of confession, but I think it is only fair for me to look at this list if I am asking you to look at it. And I think the ones I struggle with the most are, 1) the fits of rage, or anger. Maybe not a fit of rage, but definitely anger. I can get really angry if I sense something is unfair. That’s my thing. I mean my blood

pressure rises when on the highway they force you to merge lanes and everyone is taking a turn, alternating one car after the other, and then someone squeezes in rather than alternate like everyone else. Does that ever happen to you? And it is usually some massive SUV that would flatten my car so I have no choice. I get pretty heated under the collar at this kind of injustice. I have caught myself yelling at the other car, like they can hear me? And really, why should that bother me? It is one car. In the grand scheme of my life will that one car matter? Probably not. And as I look at that list I think the other struggle I find the most common for me would fall under the “and the like” category and it would be over achiever. I am an over achiever to a fault and I know it. When I take a class, I am not satisfied if I simply learn the material well and pass. I have to get an A. Nothing else is acceptable. Now really, again in the grand scheme of things, does an A really matter? Not really. I graduated at the top of my class in seminary. I had the highest GPA in the graduating class. I had all A’s and one A- in three and a half years. Does it matter? No. It gives me bragging rights but am I supposed to brag? According to Paul I am only supposed to boast in the Lord. So if bragging rights don’t matter did getting straight A’s matter? No. All of my colleagues and I that graduated together are all serving churches and non-profits and seeking to do God’s will. Graduating mattered. But the over-achiever straight A record did not. We all have these temptations we struggle with. So I invite you to identify the ones for you in that list as we now look at how to control them.

David resists the temptation to act out of anger or selfish ambition. David shows self-control. Now we need to look at WHY David shows self-control. Why does he do it? Is it because he is such a good person? No. David is not a good person. David is just as sinful as any other human being, you and I alike. And in fact later on in the book of Second Samuel David is going to show us just how sinful he can be with Bathsheba and Uriah. So if David’s goodness is not why he is able to show self-control with Saul, what is?

Well, if you look starting at verse 9 at what David says we get a clue: “But David said to Abishai, “Don’t destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD’s anointed and be guiltless? <sup>10</sup> As surely as the LORD lives,” he said, “the LORD himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. <sup>11</sup> But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD’s anointed.” Did you hear that? He is able to show self-control because he recognizes God’s will over his own. Saul is God’s anointed and he will remain as such until God changes things. It is not for David to decide. It is God’s. David stepping in and killing Saul sooner would not be God’s will. So recognizing God’s will allows David to do the right thing. In other words, self-control is really letting God be in control.

I titled this sermon “is it really self-control?” I did this for a reason. Are we really controlling ourselves? Or are we stepping aside and saying God, your will be done here. I want to get

angry but rather I am going to trust that you can help me handle this without getting angry. I am tempted to be jealous because so-and-so over there is always better than me at everything. But rather than focus on what they can do, I am going to trust that you have given me the gifts that I need to do what you have planned for me to do. We call it self-control, but it is really letting God be in control. And this brings us back to the idea that Pastor Mike and I have repeated over these last nine weeks, that this fruit of the Spirit is something we receive from God. It does not come out of our ambitions and desires, but rather God's. So self-control is setting aside our human sinful nature to argue, put others down, get ahead, feed our addictions, and you can complete the list, it is being willing to choose God's will in each situation rather than control it ourselves.

The other thing I notice about David's self-control in this passage is that he has to care for Saul in order to do it. He has a genuine care for Saul. In fact Saul says it late in the passage, verse 21 Saul says to David "Because you considered my life precious today." David had to value Saul in order to show self-control. And this brings us back to look at the whole list of the fruit of the Spirit. Because they all have to go together. In Galatians chapter 5 where we have this passage about the fruit of the Spirit, if you look in your bulletin at the responsive reading, notice that the word fruit is singular. Fruit. One fruit. These are not fruits of the Spirit. All of these 9 attributes, what should be the marks of a Christian, gifts of the Spirit, make up one fruit. They all go together. And what is the first one listed? Love. David has to have a love for God and a love for Saul in order to not kill Saul despite what Saul has done to him. Self-control does not go by itself. Self-control goes in conjunction with love, joy, peace, patience, etc.

As you look at this list of the fruit of the Spirit, you are probably like me in that you can identify which ones you are better at receiving and which ones are a challenge. But that is not what is intended. They are all one fruit together. You don't get to pick and choose. I don't get to pick and choose. I can't say that I like receiving love joy and peace but patience is not my thing. As a Christian I don't get to make that choice. If I am a Christian and I am open to receiving the fruit of the Spirit, I receive it all as one fruit. I embrace all of it.

So in order to receive the fruit, one fruit, of the Spirit, one has to be willing to love God and value others. David did this despite Saul's treatment of him. Remember that this letter to the Galatians was all about how they needed to relate to each other in the early church. How they have to behave and treat one another. The fruit that we receive from the Spirit is not so we can live in solitude and love ourselves. This is all about how we relate to one another. And if we are a Spirit filled church, we should relate to one another differently than the rest of the world. This fruit should be the mark of a Christian. Now will we be perfect at this? No. No church ever has. Some of you have been participating in the adult Sunday School class with Pastor

Mike looking at the book of Acts, the Acts of the Apostles, which is an account of the establishment of the early church. And for those of you in the class you can attest to the fact that it was often not pretty. This is why Paul wrote these letters carefully spelling out how to relate to one another in the church.

Are we willing? Are we willing to put God in control so that we can receive this fruit and share this fruit? Are we willing to do it in all areas of our lives? Am I willing to do it even when I get cut off by a giant SUV on I-15? Because if I cannot do it there I have not given God the trust that God deserves. And that is what this comes down to. The fruit comes easy if we allow God to be in control. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are a fruit that God longs to give us and grow in us. Are we, as individuals and as First Presbyterian Church of Salt Lake City, are we willing? I pray that we are. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.