

“Steps to Spontaneity”-I Thessalonians 5:16-22

Kids say the darndest things. There is the story of a minister whose church had a coffee hour right after the service. One Sunday the minister was doing the children's message when he asked a little boy why did the church have a coffee hour. Without hesitating the little boy said, "To wake the people up before they have to drive home." Kids do say the darndest things and the reason they do is that unlike adults they have not lost their spirit of spontaneity. What happens to many adults is that they stagnate. I read awhile back a pamphlet that described the seven steps to stagnation. They are: we've never done it that way before. We're not ready for that. We're doing all right without it. We've already tried that before. It costs too much. That's not our responsibility. It just won't work. God, however, wishes us to be different. How can we become more spontaneous in our living? Paul outlines that for us in his letter to the Thessalonians.

We have been looking at characteristics of the authentic life from Paul's writings in 1 Thessalonians. We have discovered that the authentic life involves God's authentic grace, God's authentic peace, God's authentic love, God's authentic courage, and God's authentic hope and incorporating these into our lives. This morning we look at the last of the characteristics: authentic spontaneity.

Let's look at Paul's three steps to authentic spontaneity. The first is to be joyful. Another way of seeing this is taking on the gift of enthusiasm. Paul says, "Rejoice evermore." Many surveys ask Americans what they want most in life. An overwhelming number of them say, "I want to be happy". What would it take to make you happy? The answer usually is, "I don't know." What people need is joy, not happiness. Joy is what God gives, not happiness. Happiness is based on circumstances, joy comes from God. When missionaries in Alaska were translating the Bible into Eskimo language there was no word for joy. So the missionaries looked to see what was the most delightful experience in the village was. They discovered that the most joyous moments were in the evening when they fed their sled dogs. The dogs would leap and yelp for joy-this made the Eskimos smile also. They used that experience to translate the word joy. In

English, the Bible reads, "After the resurrection the disciples saw Jesus and were filled with joy. In the Eskimo language, the same passage from Luke reads, "When the disciples saw Jesus they wagged their tails with delight." There are too many joyless Christians out there today. The Bible says we have inexpressible and glorious joy."

The second step to spontaneity is to be thankful. Do we have an attitude of gratitude? It seems that people fall into two categories: Humbly grateful and others are grumbly hateful. Which one are we? An attitude of gratitude means we focus on the blessings of our lives instead of our problems. There are people who go through life never thanking God for their blessings. They are like a pig eating acorns beneath a tree; never looking up once to acknowledge the source of the food. Giving thanks is keeping one's perspective.

A couple received an e-mail from their daughter at college. "We had a fire the other night at the dorm and I lost everything, but don't worry I moved in with a guy named Jim who quit school after the 11th grade to get married, but don't worry he's divorced. I think I'm expecting a child, we're taking about marriage." The parents were reeling in shock They read a little further down in the e-mail they read, "Don't worry -everything I have written is false. There was no fire, no Jim, but I did get a C- in French and I flunked Calculus. I just wanted you to put everything in its proper perspective." Keeping a good perspective in life helps us to have spontaneous gratitude.

The third step to spontaneity is to be faithful. Paul writes, "Hold on to the good." Don't stop doing what is right. When we know the truth, we are to hold on to it tightly. Have a tight grip on it. In golf, the grip is very important. The mistake that a duffer makes, a golfer with minimum skills, is that they hold the club too tightly. When there is tension in the hands and arms, it is difficult to have a smooth swing. Most golfers have heard the tip that you should hold the club like you're holding a baby bird. You want to keep it from flying away, but you don't want to crush it. But when it comes to believing the truth, we should hold it tightly and don't let go.

But this goes on good belief. It involves good behavior. Good behavior will not get you into heaven. But if Jesus is in your heart, there will be good consistent, faithful Behavior. We often think just because we don't do anything wrong, we're a good person. You know the saying: "I don't smoke, drink, or chew, or date girls that do." Goodness isn't defined by what you refrain from doing wrong, it only happens when you do good deeds. The devil doesn't want you bad, he just wants you to be indifferent.

The reason we hold onto the good isn't because we're good. It is because God is good. We cannot say what a good person we are, but we can say what a good God we serve. Once we know the good belief, hold on to it tightly and it will lead you to good behavior. Jesus doesn't say "Let your light shine so that people so that they may see your good works and can see how good you are, He says, "Let your light shine so that they may see your good deeds and glorify God."

We have looked at what it means to live out an authentic life by being spontaneous. I challenge us all to take an inventory of how spontaneous we really are. The Holy Spirit is waiting and eager to make us authentically spontaneous in living out an authentic life.