

## INTRODUCTION

This is the final message in the series "GRACE-FRUIT: Jesus Living in Me." Over the past nine weeks we've examined the nine flavors of the Fruit of the Spirit. In order to put the Fruit of the Spirit in the full context of Galatians, let's read Galatians 5:22-25:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." (Galatians 5:19-25)

The Fruit of the Spirit is such an important list in the New Testament that when we were designing this Worship Center about 15 years ago, I noticed there were nine doors entering the building, so I suggested we name each door after a Fruit of the Spirit. The Building Committee thought it was a good idea. So, you've probably noticed each door has a different name of the Fruit of the Spirit over it.

These nine traits should be evident in the personality of every Christian. Over the past nine weeks I've spoken mostly about the WHAT—what are those nine characteristics? In this message I want to talk about the HOW—how we can we live a life that demonstrates those nine positive characteristics. I'm calling "The Secret to a Fruitful Life." But it's not a secret at all: in fact, it's in the second part of the title of this series. The Key is Jesus living in me.

In John 15, Jesus tells us HOW to live a fruitful life. Have you ever seen those movies about a nuclear powered sub that is going to launch a missile? In order to launch the missile, both the Captain and the XO have to insert two keys into the launch director and turn them at the same time. It takes both of those keys to launch the missile. When you combine the key of John 15 with the key of Galatians 5, you are ready to launch out in the exciting adventure of life full of the Fruit of the Spirit!

Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:1-5)

Jesus spoke these words the night before He was crucified. He knew His time left on earth was short. He would be crucified, resurrected, and after forty days, would ascend back to His Father. The disciples would no longer have Jesus physically present with them. But Jesus promised them something—or Someone—even better. He promised He would send the Holy Spirit to live in the disciples, and the Holy Spirit would bear witness to Jesus. He would empower the believers to demonstrate the personality of Jesus, the Fruit of the Spirit. Here are four life-changing truths that Jesus shared about living a fruitful life.

### 1. Fruit is proof of my relationship with Jesus

When you buy fruit in the grocery store, you see a little sticker on it. That means somewhere between the tree and the store, someone inspected that piece of fruit. When it comes to people, Jesus said we are all to be fruit-inspectors. In Matthew 7:16 He said, "By their fruit you will recognize them."

God's plan for your life isn't that you'll be successful. Instead, He wants you to be fruitful. Jesus said, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:8) The best way you can live a life that gives glory to God is to bear much fruit. Jesus said that your fruitfulness is PROOF you are His disciple. We sometimes say, "The proof is in the pudding." When it comes to the Christian life, the proof is in the fruit!

Christian fruit is expressed in two different ways. In one sense, the fruit of a Christian is another Christian. It involved spiritual reproduction. Inside an apple there are apple seeds, and in each seed there is the potential for an apple tree that will, in turn, produce many more apples. God's first command to Adam and Eve was to "Be fruitful and multiply." That's still God's plan for us—that we should be involved in leading other people to faith in Jesus Christ. The reason this church is here is because someone planted gospel seeds in the lives of people who planted more seeds of the gospel, and we're experiencing the harvest of fruitful Christians who have come before us. Are you planting seeds of the gospel wherever you go? Can you point to someone and acknowledge that you planted the seeds of the gospel into their life? The fruit of a Christian is another Christian.

But fruit also describes these nine virtues we've been studying in Galatians 5. Fruit is simply the outward expression of the inner nature. Some people can tell a tree by its leaves or bark, but I can't. But when I see an apple hanging on a tree, I know that's an apple tree, it has the inner nature of an apple. When I see an orange hanging on a tree, I say, "That's an orange tree." When I see spaghetti hanging on a tree, I say, "That's a spaghetti tree." Just kidding. Spaghetti doesn't grow on trees...it grows on bushes, I think.

One of the largest and oldest grapevines in the world can be seen just outside the city of London. It's called the Great Vine at Hampton Court. It was planted in 1768 and some of the branches are over 200 feet long. The vine is protected year-round by a custom-designed greenhouse. It only has one trunk, or main vine, which is twelve feet in diameter. Although there are hundreds of branches, many of them maintain a vital relationship with the vine; those branches are the ones that receive life-giving nourishment from the vine and the result is that every year about 800 pounds of delicious grapes grow from them. Many other branches on this vine only grow leaves, but there is no fruit. Those branches, though they are full of leaves, are cut off and burned because they compete with the fruitful branches for the life of the vine. A vinedresser will tell you that a leafy branch only has a superficial attachment to the vine.

To me, that's a parable of religious people versus true Christians. Religious people have a lot of leaves to adorn their lives. They attend church and are fluent in religious language. They talk about the Lord, but they only have a superficial attachment to Him. But when you see real fruit in the life of a person, you know that they have a living relationship with Jesus. What do people see when they inspect your fruit?

## **2. I can't produce fruit; I bear the fruit Jesus produces**

There's a difference between producing fruit and bearing fruit. Think about it: A branch just shows off the fruit the vine has produced. Jesus is the vine, and I'm the branch. If you get that backwards you're headed for spiritual fatigue and frustration.

Now that you've memorized the song, you know all nine expressions of the Fruit of the Spirit. But if you're Type-A personality, your temptation is to put them on a to-do list and then make them your daily goals. So you think, "Today I must be completely loving, totally joyful, absolutely peaceful..." And you go all the way through the list. If that's you, then you're setting yourself up for frustration and failure. Branches don't produce fruit: they only bear fruit.

Listen to the words of Jesus again, "No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." (John 15:4)

The biggest mistake you can make about the Fruit of the Spirit is to think you can manufacture love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Fruit can't be manufactured. You'll never see a fruit factory. You might see a factory that cans or processes fruit, but you'll never see one manufacturing fruit. There are factories that make cars, clothes, and computers, but not fruit. Fruit comes naturally when there is a proper mix of water, sun, and soil nutrients. You can't manufacture Spiritual Fruit either. It comes supernaturally when there is a proper mix of the Life of the Son, the power of the Holy Spirit, and your willingness.

A village leader from a remote area of Nepal visited a modern city for the first time. He was fascinated by the electric lights, which he had never seen. He was amazed he could flip a switch on the wall and a small ball of glass in the ceiling would shine brightly. With the little money the village had given him, he went into a hardware store, bought a few light bulbs and a plastic wall switch.

When the other villagers saw his strange items they asked him what they were. He said, "Just wait until dark, and you will see." When the members of the village gathered that night they saw the man had tied the small balls of glass to the underside of his ceiling. He attached the plastic switch to the wall. Finally he said, "Watch this!" And he flipped the switch. Nothing happened, of course. What he didn't know was the switch and the bulbs were useless unless they were connected to the source of power, electricity.

Trying to demonstrate the nine expressions of the Fruit of the Spirit on my own is like that man trying to make lights shine with no power. Fortunately, we have access a supernatural power to create love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

My friend in heaven, Ron Dunn understood this truth. He wrote: "A branch is just a grape rack that God has there to hang His fruit on. My responsibility isn't to produce fruit; my responsibility is just to be available for God to hang His fruit on me."

## **3. Branches that are pruned produce more fruit**

When you examine Jesus' words carefully in John 15 you see He mentions three levels of fruitfulness. He speaks of bearing fruit, then he mentions bearing MUCH fruit, but there's a third level He called MORE fruit. And there is only one way for a vine to produce more fruit, it has to be pruned. Jesus said, "Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." (John 15:2)

Remember, Jesus is the vine, His Father is the Gardener, and we're the branches. Where's the Holy Spirit? Jesus didn't say, but it would make sense that the Holy Spirit is represented by the life-giving sap flowing from the roots into the vine and then into the branches.

Imagine you get to the place in your Christian life where you are walking in the Spirit. You have surrendered control of your life to Jesus, and people see all nine personality traits in your life. What comes next? Do you think you'll get a blue ribbon, or a trophy? Not quite. The Divine Gardener comes along and looks at your life. He smiles, and then He does something totally unexpected. He pulls out a pair of giant clippers and He begins to cut away parts of your life.

The difference between a beginning gardener and a master gardener is that a master gardener understands fruit trees and grape vines have to be pruned back in order to produce the most fruit. That's counter intuitive. You would think you'd do everything you could to keep the trees branches and vine branches growing longer and stronger, but if you never prune them they don't produce fruit. For instance, we have an apple tree in our yard we've never pruned. Do you know what you call an apple tree that's never pruned? A shade tree. Early on, there were a few small apples, but we decided we needed the tree to shade one our windows, so it's a large, leafy tree, but it no longer produces apples.

On the other hand, I also have a grapevine growing on an arbor. And every winter I prune off all the old branches. I cut them back all the way to the main vine. If you looked at that vine after I pruned it you would think I had killed it. But every summer it grows more grapes than we can eat. The difference? Pruning.

Pruning is painful. When the Lord starts pruning our lives, we want to say, "No, Lord, not THAT! Don't take that away! Don't cut that!" But the loving Gardener says, "I'm doing this because I love you so much that I want you to bear even MORE fruit."

The best apples I've ever tasted are grown on the slopes of Northern Israel near the Syrian border. There are Israeli Druze villagers who have transformed the mountainsides into orchards with hundreds of apple trees. Each one is loaded down with apples until some of the branches have to be propped up. My friend Reuven Solomon, our tour guide, said he visited one of those orchards and he was surprised to see gashes and gouges on the trunks and larger branches. He asked the farmer about all the gashes on the trees. The apple farmer said they discovered that if a healthy apple tree wasn't producing much fruit, they would cut the trunk and slash the bark with large knives. There was something in the tree that responded to those wounds and the trees became much more fruitful. The farmer said, "The trees with the most scars produce the most fruit."

What a parable! I'm looking into the faces of people I know who have a lot of scars and gouges. Oh, you can't see them physically, but they've been pruned in many ways. And yet, they aren't bitter or angry. They are some of the most loving, joyful, and patience people you've ever met. They understand the value of God's pruning.

One of the most fruitful servants in the history of Christianity was the little guy named Paul. His real name was Saul, but after he became a Christian, they called him Paul. Do you know what *Paulos* means in Greek? It means "little one." We'd translate it "shorty." So God used this guy nicknamed the Apostle Shorty to start churches and write over half the books in the New Testament. But when you read the Book of Acts you see that his life was full of pain and adversity. In other words, God did a lot of pruning in his life. In 2 Corinthians 11 he mentions just a few of the hardships he endured. "I've been flogged five times with the Jews' thirty-nine lashes, beaten by Roman rods three times, pummeled with rocks once. I've been shipwrecked three times, and immersed in the open sea for a night and a day. In hard traveling year in and year out, I've had to ford rivers, fend off robbers, struggle with friends, struggle with foes. I've been at risk in the city, at risk in the country, endangered by desert sun and sea storm, and betrayed by those I thought were my brothers. I've known drudgery and hard labor, many a long and lonely night without sleep, many a missed meal, blasted by the cold, naked to the weather." (2 Corinthians 11:24-27 *The Message*)

Most of us would love to be used like Paul, but do we really want to be pruned like Paul?

#### **4. My main responsibility is to remain firmly connected to Jesus**

John 15:5 has become one of my life verses. Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) Apart from Jesus I can't be loving; apart from Jesus I can't be joyful, just go down the list of all nine flavors. Jesus said my responsibility is to remain in Him. The KJV says, "Abide." It's the word *meno*, which means, "Stay connected to." And Jesus used it 10 times in these few verses.

J.C. Ryle captured the idea when he wrote: "When Jesus said, 'Abide in me' He meant, 'Cling to me. Stick fast to me. Live your life in close and intimate communion with me. Cast your whole weight on me. Never let go your hold on me for a moment.'"

The best word to describe the relationship of a branch to a vine is dependence. I am dependent on Jesus as the vine to allow His life to flow through me. The branch is just an extension of the vine. Some people reverse that picture and they live like they're the vine and Jesus is the branch—an attachment to us. We have our plans, our goals, our priorities, and we attach Jesus to our lives. Jesus is a part of your life, like your family, your job, and your hobbies. Jesus doesn't want to be an attachment to your life; He wants to be your life.

I've known a lot of Christians through the years who were struggling and striving and moaning and groaning to live the Christian life. They developed a spiritual hernia from struggling too hard to be fruitful. "Ooooh, I'm going to love that person if it kills me! I'm going to be joyful today if it kills me!" And it almost does. Relax. I've spent a good bit of time working on my grapevine,

and I've never seen one of the branches sweating and groaning to produce a grape. Instead they're just up there hanging in and hanging out with the vine.

To remain in Christ isn't some passive act of sitting in a lotus position and going, "ohhhhhhmm," and expecting Jesus to just take possession of your personality. It is an active seeking after Jesus with your whole heart. It is staying in constant contact with Him through prayer, through memorizing and quoting scripture. Psalm 1 describes a person who meditates on God's Word day and night and when he does, he is like a tree planted by the rivers of water whose fruit does not wither. Once you decide to start actively abiding in Christ, you'll be a busy person. But you won't be busy doing a hundred different things; you'll be doing one primary thing—abiding in Jesus.

So starting tomorrow, why don't you take five minutes in the morning, or at some other time, and simply read God's Word for that time. Ignore everything else and just imagine yourself stuck into Christ like a branch is stuck into the vine.

So how do you feel as we come to the end of this series about fruit? Do you feel a little guilty because you don't recognize much evidence of fruit in your life? Or do you feel overwhelmed by this list? Or are you thinking, "Fruit? We've been talking about fruit?" Let me tell you something profound about fruit. Now, before I say something profound, I have to let you know beforehand that it's profound otherwise you wouldn't recognize it as profound. Ready? Fruit grows. That's it. Have you ever walked up to an orange tree with no oranges, and then while you're staring at it, "Pop!" a fully-mature orange suddenly appears? Fruit grows, and if you don't have a fully mature set of all nine flavors of the fruit of the Spirit, it just means God is still working on you; I know He's still working on me.

## CONCLUSION

When I was serving in my first full-time church after seminary, I faced a lot of discouragement. I didn't have any joy in preaching and serving. I felt like a failure. I was doing everything in the strength of my own flesh, and I was worn out mentally and spiritually. I was seriously considering getting out of the ministry and applying to medical school. I even checked into taking Organic Chemistry classes at a local college, because I knew I'd need that to score well on my MCAT test. This was in 1978 and somebody gave me a cassette tape of an unknown preacher named Charles Stanley. It was a message from John 15 on how to live a fruitful life. Then I read a little book by Major Ian Thomas entitled *The Saving Life of Christ*. God used the truth from John 15 and Ian Thomas to change my life. Basically, I learned I didn't have to live the Christian life; Jesus is available to live His life through me.

Major Ian Thomas served in the British Army during World War II. He was a decorated hero who received the flag of surrender from the German Army. He was a perfectionist, a soldier's soldier who lived strictly by Army regulations. After the war, he set out to devote that same sense of obedience and perfection to the Christian life. He was determined to be a perfect Christian. He was constantly frustrated because he continually found himself unable to be Christ-like in his actions and reactions. He was on the edge of spiritual burnout when he fell on his face before the Lord and they had the following conversation.

“The Lord said to me, ‘For seven years, with utmost sincerity you have been trying to live for Me, on my behalf, the life that I have been waiting for seven years to live through you. Since that day you have given mental consent to the truth that I have been in your heart, and have accepted it as a theory. But you have lived totally ignoring the fact. You have been busy trying to do for Me all that only I can do through you.’ I learned to say, ‘Lord Jesus, I can’t—You never said I could. But You can, and always said You would.’”

Why don’t you pray, “Jesus, I can’t. You never said I could. You can. You always said you would!” And 35 years after I discovered this truth, I’m more excited about serving the Lord than ever before. Will you be willing to pray that prayer today?

How good are you at juggling? Through the years I’ve practiced and I can juggle three balls pretty well. The world record for juggling is 13 balls, set last year, but he only was able to catch each ball once! Could you imagine trying to juggle nine balls? Here’s the love ball, the joy ball, the patience ball...and I’ve still got six others. Wow! Pretty hard. Oh, but here’s just one ball to juggle: Abide in Christ. Remain in Christ. Stay dynamically connected to Jesus and when I just concentrate on that ball, the result is that all nine of those balls start circling my life.

That’s the secret to a fruitful life.

## OUTLINE

### 1. Fruit is proof of my relationship with Jesus

"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." *John 15:8*

### 2. I can't produce fruit; I bear the fruit Jesus produces

Jesus said, "No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." *John 15:4*

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Jesus said, "Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." *John 15:2*

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Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." *John 15:5*



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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes