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CHRISTIAN CHARACTER: THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

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**ARE YOU
 BEARING
 SPIRITUAL FRUIT?
 Galatians 5:22-23**

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CHRISTIAN CHARACTER: THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

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In one of His final conversations with His disciples, Jesus talked about the importance of fruit-bearing. He said, *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener . . . I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit."* **John 15:1, 5**

Jesus used the analogy of the vine to teach about the necessary relationship which must exist between the Holy Spirit and the believer so that Christ-likeness may be produced in the believer. It is the Holy Spirit who produces spiritual fruit in us as we yield to Him. **THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST PRODUCED IN US, SO THAT WE MIGHT SHOW THE WORLD WHAT HE IS LIKE.**

In a vine, the branches depend upon the trunk for life, and the vine needs the branches to bear its fruit. Jesus told His disciples that He had come into the world to show the world what the Father is like. He said that when He went away He would send the Holy Spirit to be with them and help them. The Spirit would reveal Jesus to them. As Jesus took a human body to reveal the Father to the world, so the eternal Spirit dwells within the believer to reveal Christ to the world. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."* **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**

In this lesson you will study what the Bible says about the fruit of the Spirit, which is Christian character, and how it is produced in your life by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that you may honor God.

CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER

The principle of fruit-bearing is revealed in the first chapter of Genesis: *"Then God said, 'Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.'"* **Genesis 1:11**

Note that each plant and tree was to produce fruit according to its kind. Spiritual fruit-bearing follows the same principle. John the Baptist, the Messiah's herald, demanded from his converts: *"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance."* **Matthew 3:8**

In **John 15:1-16**, Jesus emphasized this principle by making it clear that His followers, in order to develop and maintain spiritual life, must bear abundant fruit for God. What kind of fruit was Jesus talking about? The answer is given in **Galatians 5:22-23**: *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."*

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS THE CHRIST-LIKE CHARACTER: a character that reveals what Jesus is like. It is the outward expression of the holy nature of God in the believer. It is actually the development of the life of Christ in the Christian.

A NEW NATURE

Galatians 5:16–26 describes a spiritual conflict between the sinful nature and the divine nature. The conflict is this: *“For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.” Galatians 5:17*

The word contrary means “opposite in character.” When the believer does not yield to the Spirit’s control, he is unable to resist the desires of the sinful nature. But when the Spirit is in control, he is like fertile ground in which the Spirit can produce His fruit. By the power of the Spirit he can overcome the desires of the flesh and live an abundant and fruitful life. To win in this spiritual conflict, the secret is to walk in the Spirit. *“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 5:24–25).*

How do we do this? By:

- Listening to His voice,
- Following His leading,
- Obeying His orders, and
- Trusting and depending on Him.

To show how sharp is the contrast between the acts of the sinful nature and the fruit of the Spirit, the writer to the Galatians listed them in the very same chapter (**Galatians 5**). As long as the Holy Spirit is in control, abiding in and empowering the believer, He naturally manifests His fruit in the believer: *Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God’s laws, and it never will. That’s why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.) And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. Romans 8:5–10 NLT.*

In the same manner, the sinful nature of the unbeliever produces its work in him. Do you see the principle of fruit-bearing here? Each produces fruit after its kind. In John 14:16–17 we read the words of Jesus to His disciples: *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.”*

The word another in this text is taken from a Greek word suggesting “another of the same kind.” The Holy Spirit is of the same kind as Jesus. It is the nature of the Holy Spirit to produce a Christ-like character in the believer. It is the nature of sinful flesh to produce wickedness. A fruit is a living thing. If you have yielded control of your life to the Holy Spirit, He will unfailingly produce in you the fruit of the Spirit in a continuous and plentiful harvest. As a Christian, all of the genuine and lasting beauty of character adorning your life, the Christlikeness, inward and outward, is the work of the Holy Spirit—*“until Christ is formed in you.” “Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I’m going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives.” Galatians 4:19 NLT*

THE VINE AND ITS BRANCHES

In **John 15:1–17** Jesus used the grapevine and its branches to picture the kind of relationship that must exist between Himself and the believer in order for the believer to have fruitfulness. One does not need to be an expert in gardening to realize that what is of greatest importance in a grapevine is the quality of fruit the vine bears. This is seen in the way Jesus spoke about the branches of the vine:

1. **THERE ARE BRANCHES WHICH BEAR NO FRUIT—THEY ARE CUT OFF! (John 15:2).** The purpose of a branch is to bear fruit. If a branch does not bear fruit, it is of no value to the gardener, so he cuts it off. A sad example of this kind of judgment is found in the history of the nation of Israel. Israel was designed to be God’s vineyard, to reflect God’s love, mercy, goodness, and glory among the nations. But Israel failed, and judgment followed. Here is what God said about the failure of Israel as His vineyard: *What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. Isaiah 5:4–5; Romans 11:21*

2. THERE ARE BRANCHES WHICH DO NOT REMAIN ATTACHED TO THE VINE—THEY ARE THROWN INTO THE FIRE AND BURNED.

“No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.” John 15:4

It is impossible for these branches to bear fruit, because they are not a part of the vine. Have you noticed that a branch which has been broken off soon begins to turn brown and die? Because it is broken, the vital connection to the life of the vine is severed. No longer can the life-giving resources flow into the branch, and without this the branch quickly dies. Then it is gathered up and burned.

Salvation is a real experience of surrendering oneself in faith to the Savior and becoming a new creation. It is our link to the life-giving resources of Jesus Christ. It is a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and an ongoing relationship with Him. He is the vine, and we are the branches: *“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5 NLT.*

To be in Christ is not merely to join a religion or perform religious ceremonies or learn religious creeds. It is a commitment of your life to Him and a desire to be transformed into His image by the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. THERE ARE BRANCHES THAT BEAR FRUIT—THEY ARE TRIMMED CLEAN.

“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.” John 15:2

The gardener wants the life-giving resources of the vine to flow into the fruit rather than into worthless leaves and branches. Therefore, in order to produce more and better fruit, pruning or trimming of the branch is a necessary process. God’s plan for us is that we produce much fruit. He sends His Holy Spirit to justify us, indwell us, and sanctify us in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ: *Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:11*

To be sanctified means to be separated from sin and set apart unto God, conformed into the image of Christ: *For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. Romans 8:29*

Pruning of the branches refers to sanctification: *“God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.” 2 Thessalonians 2:13*

WHY IS THE PRUNING PROCESS NECESSARY? When a person expresses true faith in Jesus as Savior and is born again of the Spirit, this does not mean that he is instantly perfect. A Christian begins the process of being changed into the Christ-like nature. This takes place as the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, begins to trim away those attitudes and behaviors which are not like Christ. The Christian progressively shows increased signs of fruit-bearing in his spiritual life, much as the branch progressively shows signs of bearing fruit long before the fruit reaches a mature state. Spiritual pruning develops greater evidence of the nature of Christ, bringing one to spiritual maturity.

CONDITIONS FOR FRUIT-BEARING

As we look at the teaching given in **John 15** we see that there are at least three conditions for a plentiful harvest of spiritual fruit: **1) pruning by the Father; 2) remaining in Christ; and 3) Christ remaining in us.**

- 1. PRUNING BY THE FATHER.** As we have already seen, pruning, or trimming, is necessary if we are to produce the fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit actually deals with us about sin even before we are saved. He convicts us of it, creates in us a desire to turn from it, and produces in us godly sorrow and repentance which lead to salvation. **Acts 2:37**

Once we are saved the Spirit continues to convict us of those parts of our lives which are unlike Christ, purifying us and making us holy: *Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. 1 Thessalonians 5:23*

For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God’s discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. So take a new grip with your tired hands and

*strengthen your weak knees. Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong. **Hebrews 12:10–14***

In a Christian's life, the discipline of pruning is accomplished by the Father through circumstances and influences that bring a growing maturity and dependence on the Lord:

Hebrews 12:5–6 reveals that the discipline or correction of the Lord shows that we belong to Him: *My Son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.*

The need for pruning or trimming clean is stated in **James 1:2–4**: *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

2. **REMAINING IN CHRIST.** Jesus used the phrase “remain in” when He described the relationship between Himself and His followers. He said, “*Remain in me, and I will remain in you*” (John 15:4).

The first phrase, “*Remain in me,*” concerns our position in Christ. In the Amplified Version of the New Testament **2 Corinthians 5:17** says, “*Therefore if any person is [ingrafted] in Christ (the Messiah) he is a new creation (a new creature altogether).*”

The word ingrafted means to be attached, to become a part of. Thus to remain in Christ speaks of our unity and fellowship with Him as described in **Ephesians 2:6**: “*And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.*”

This means that Christ is now in heaven, and those who are saved are in Him there in position or standing. In meditating on this important word ‘in,’ we reach the conclusion that where we are is all-important. We must be in Christ as the branch must be in the vine. This ingrafting or attaching of the believer's life to Christ is the basis by which the life of the believer becomes fruitful.

Paul, the great apostle, teacher, and preacher, the man who held two citizenships and was highly educated, considered his position in Christ as the most important thing in his life. Above all else, he wanted to be found “in Christ:” *Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. **Philippians 3:8–9 NLT***

Paul is an excellent example of the transformed life which yields the fruit of the Christ-like nature. Evidence of his fruitful union with Christ is seen in the effects of his ministry and writings. Paul's life, even today, continues to influence the lives and beliefs of Christians around the world.

3. **CHRIST REMAINING IN ME.** The second phrase, “I will remain in you,” has to do with my fruitfulness or Christ-likeness here on earth. It relates to my daily life, in which I manifest the moral perfection of the character of Christ by the power of the Spirit. It is the holiness of Christ shining before the world through my life.

Gardeners know the importance of having an abundant source of the life of the vine flowing into the fruit. Bigger and better fruit is produced when the fruit receives and retains the life resources of the vine. The indwelling life of Christ changes the nature of the believer as that life resource remains in him. Note: I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus, just as he did for all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours. **1 Corinthians 1:2**

This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the church leaders and deacons. **Philippians 1:1 NLT**

...that the saints are in Christ but also in Corinth and in Philippi. The Christian life has always been this way—the Christian is in Christ, but he also lives in the world. He reveals Christ to the world through his daily life. This means that Christ must live in the Christian. We read in **1 John 2:6** that, “*Whoever claims to live in him [Christ] must walk as Jesus did.*”

Walking as Jesus did is possible only through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the life-giving sap of the vine which keeps the branches alive and makes them fruitful. In the same way, it is our risen Savior alone who sustains us by His indwelling presence and through the Holy Spirit causes us to live a consistent and fruitful Christian life. **Do you recall the last request Jesus made of the Father in His prayer recorded in John 17?** It was that He himself would be in us, *I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them.* **John 17:26 NLT.**

Any attempt we make to imitate Christ's life by our own efforts will result in utter failure. A fruitful life is possible only through this interdependent relationship: the Christian IN Christ; Christ IN the Christian.

THE NECESSITY OF BEARING SPIRITUAL FRUIT

"Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions. 'Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.' **Matthew 7:15–23 NLT**

In Matthew 7:15–23 we have some striking sayings from the lips of our Savior about the necessity of producing Christian character. False prophets, He said, would be recognized by the kind of fruit they produce: *"Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."* **Matthew 7: 16–19**

Jesus went on to say that there would even be those who cast out demons in His name whom He never knew (vv. 22–23). How is this possible? The answer is given in **2 Thessalonians 2:9**, *"...in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders."*

This Scripture declares that it is possible for miracles and gifts of the Spirit to be imitated by Satan. But a man's true relationship to Christ can be known by observing whether the fruit of the Spirit or the works of the flesh are produced in his character, *a good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit.* **Matthew 7:17–18,**

But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. **1 John 4:8**

Christian character cannot be imitated. It is the natural result of Christ revealing His holy character in and through us.

THE PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL FRUIT-BEARING

In considering the purpose for spiritual fruit-bearing, we will look at three aspects, which have to do with expression, discipleship, and glory.

1. **FRUIT-BEARING IS AN EXPRESSION OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST.** Every fruit is an expression of the life of the plant from which it comes. In the same way, as members of Christ's body, there should naturally be an expression of the full beauty of the character of Christ in us. **For what purpose do you exist? Has God saved you just so you will sit in a church building for a few hours each week?** No! You exist to live out the teaching you receive, to reveal Christ to this sinful and lost world. People need to see Him through the lives of Christians. When they take notice of our profession to be Christians, we may become the only Bible that many of them will ever "read." A life given to Christ expresses to others the kind of love He has for them. When I am an expression of Christ, my ears will hear their cries, my eyes will see their needs, my feet will take me to help them, and my hands will reach out to care for them. In this way I will become a channel of the life of Christ. He will minister to them through me. Are you a channel of the life of Christ? Does He minister to others through you?
2. **FRUIT-BEARING IS AN EVIDENCE OF DISCIPLESHIP.** Jesus said that we should bear "much fruit," thus showing that we are His disciples, *when you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.* **John 15:8 NLT**

He pointed out that every student who has been fully trained is like his teacher, *Students are not greater than their teacher. But the student who is fully trained will become like the teacher. Luke 6:40*

This means that it is not enough simply to accept Him so that you can say, *"See, I am a Christian!"* He wants you to bear much fruit. If you do this, it is proof that you have truly learned of Him, that you are His disciple. It shows that you have taken steps beyond the first one of being born again and receiving Christ. It demonstrates that Christ really is the Lord of your life.

3. **FRUIT-BEARING BLESSES OTHER PEOPLE.** First it blesses those who receive benefit from the manifestation of Christ's character in your life, and it also blesses fellow believers who observe spiritual fruit in you.
4. **FRUIT-BEARING BRINGS GLORY TO GOD.** Jesus said, *"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit."* **John 15:8**

Bearing spiritual fruit is the result of the abundant life. When you allow the life of Christ to be expressed through you, people will see the effects it produces and will give praise to God: *In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. Matthew 5:16 NLT*

A PLENTIFUL HARVEST

Fruit-bearing plants must be properly cared for if you want them to produce a good yield of fruit. The same principle is true in the spiritual life. Let us look at some ways you can help to realize a plentiful harvest of spiritual fruit in your life. After you have received the Holy Spirit as your constant Companion, you must cooperate with Him so that He can produce fruit in you. There are several ways you can do this.

1. **CULTIVATE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD.** To cultivate means to encourage, to prepare for growth. Long before the first blossoms appear or the initial signs of the fruit are seen, much has been done to prepare the plant for the expected fruit. The gardener carefully tends the plant so that it will be more productive. This tender, caring process is cultivation. It is in our relationship with God, through continuous fellowship, that our lives are changed and developed toward fruition. As a child of God, you enjoy blessed fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: *God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:9*

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

2 Corinthians 13:14;

We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:3

You can cultivate this fellowship by spending time with God in communion and prayer. You can also cultivate it by obeying His Word. When Jesus taught His disciples about spiritual fruit, He told them to let His words remain in them *But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! John 15:7*

He also said that they would remain in His love as they continued to obey His commands, especially His command to love one another: *"I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. John 15:9-10*

Your obedience to God's Word will bring the same results. You will experience the fellowship and love of God, and your life will be made fruitful because of your relationship with Him.

2. **SEEK TO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS.** A gardener usually finds it desirable to have plants grouped according to the fruit each produces: All of the orange trees will be planted together, all of the corn will be together in one field, and so forth. This aids cultivation and the reaping of the harvest. Through fellowship with other Christians you can be encouraged to live the Christian life, and you can encourage others. The first Christians had fellowship with each other every day *They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity Acts 2:46*

It is no wonder their lives were powerful testimonies for the gospel and made those around them thirsty for salvation. There was a daily harvest of souls as the Lord added to their number those who were being saved: *...all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. Acts 2: 47*

3. **ACCEPT THE MINISTRY OF GODLY LEADERS.** God uses leaders to feed and nourish His people. *Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Ephesians 4:11–13*

Ephesians 4:11–13 emphasizes that the purpose of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers in the church is to build up God's people so that they will become mature. The same truth is expressed in 1 Corinthians 3:6, where the apostle Paul spoke of the different roles he and Apollos had in helping the Corinthians: *"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."* **1 Corinthians 3:6**

As you accept and apply the teachings God gives through leaders He has called, you are brought into a place of greater fruitfulness.

4. **EXERCISE WATCHFULNESS AND PROTECTION.** There are always dangers which threaten a plant. A healthy plant is better able to protect itself from these dangers and to respond to the watchfulness of the gardener. The Christian needs to watch for those things which can destroy his spiritual life. Bad habits, wrong attitudes and associations, destructive thoughts and wrong desires should all be considered as threats to spiritual development. When the people of Israel entered the Promised Land they were to destroy the wicked nations who lived there. That was God's plan, but Israel did not do this. As a result, the Israelites were drawn into the wicked ways of those nations: *Israel failed to destroy the nations in the land, as the LORD had commanded them. Instead, they mingled among the pagans and adopted their evil customs. They worshiped their idols, which led to their downfall. Psalm 106:34–36*

Their experience is a warning to us. We must be careful that we do not permit ungodly habits and attitudes to remain or be formed in our lives. Hebrews 12:15 warns us not to allow any bitter root (bitterness, hatred) to grow up. Like the thorns Jesus described in the parable of the sower: *The seeds that fell among the thorns represent those who hear the message, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. And so they never grow into maturity. Luke 8:14*

...bad habits and attitudes can prevent you from becoming the kind of person God wants you to be. You also need to be aware that Satan will try to oppose you and keep you from surrendering to the Holy Spirit. He does not want you to make Christ the supreme and only Master of your life.

A MOST EXCELLENT WAY

It is sometimes difficult to tell the difference between real and imitation fruit. The imitation fruit can give the impression of being real, but if you try to eat it, immediately you know that it is not real. The same analogy may be made of Christians. On the surface it may be difficult to distinguish between a person who truly is like Christ and one who merely has an outward appearance of a Christian. They may display similar behaviors such as a manifestation of spiritual gifts, but the true test comes as the inward character of the individual is expressed in his everyday life.

Jesus said that true disciples of His are known by the quality of love they express towards each other. The fruit of the Spirit is so very important in our lives! The Christians who lived in Corinth at the time the New Testament was written exercised nine gifts of the Spirit—they spoke with tongues, they prophesied, they performed miracles. However, they lacked the fruit of the same Spirit—they competed with one another in their local assembly: *But in the following instructions, I cannot praise you. For it sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together. First, I hear that there are divisions among you when you meet as a church, and to some extent I believe it. 1 Corinthians 11:17–18*

When one of you has a dispute with another believer, how dare you file a lawsuit and ask a secular court to decide the matter instead of taking it to other believers! Don't you realize that someday we believers will judge the world? And since you are

*going to judge the world, can't you decide even these little things among yourselves? Don't you realize that we will judge angels? So you should surely be able to resolve ordinary disputes in this life. If you have legal disputes about such matters, why go to outside judges who are not respected by the church? I am saying this to shame you. Isn't there anyone in all the church who is wise enough to decide these issues? But instead, one believer sues another—right in front of unbelievers! Even to have such lawsuits with one another is a defeat for you. Why not just accept the injustice and leave it at that? Why not let yourselves be cheated? Instead, you yourselves are the ones who do wrong and cheat even your fellow believers. **1 Corinthians 6:1–8***

*Some lived in immorality: I can hardly believe the report about the sexual immorality going on among you—something that even pagans don't do. I am told that a man in your church is living in sin with his stepmother. You are so proud of yourselves, but you should be mourning in sorrow and shame. And you should remove this man from your fellowship. **1 Corinthians 5:1–2***

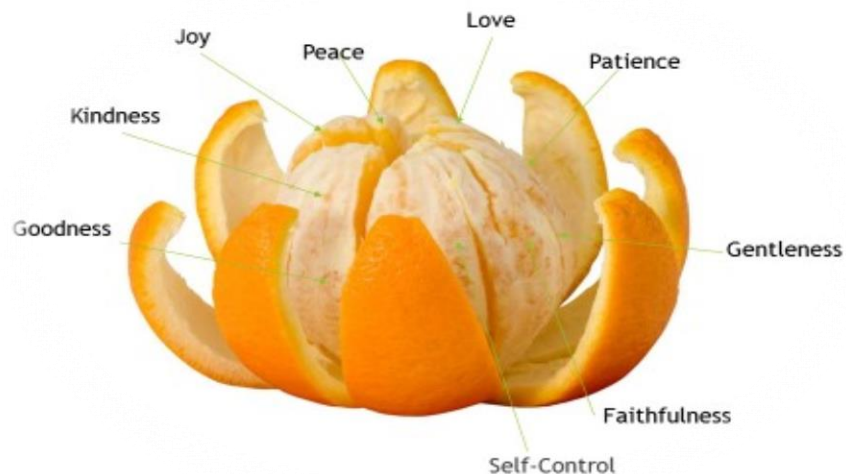
*Some even ate of the Lord's Supper while they were drunk: When you meet together, you are not really interested in the Lord's Supper. For some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk. **1 Corinthians 11:20–21***

In writing to them, the apostle Paul was very patient and loving. He wanted them to know the empowering Spirit, who gave them gifts to build up the church. But more than that, he wanted them to know the sanctifying Spirit who could change their character and make them like Jesus. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to desire eagerly the gifts of the Spirit, but he concluded by saying, *"And now I will show you the most excellent way."* **1 Corinthians 12:31**

THE "MOST EXCELLENT WAY" IS LOVE—God's love as it is expressed and described in 1 Corinthians 13. There we read that the gifts will cease someday, but that love will continue and remain (1 Corinthians 13: 8–10, 13). Light is made up of the blending of the seven colors of the rainbow, but it is one light. In a similar way, the fruit of the Spirit is made up of several qualities of character—yet it is one fruit. This is in contrast to the gifts of the Spirit. There are several spiritual gifts, and the Holy Spirit gives them to individuals according to His sovereign will. One person receives a certain gift, and another receives a different one: *A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.*

1 Corinthians 12:7–11

But the fruit of the Spirit cannot be separated—it is one product, one thing. It can be summed up in the word... love. Just as an orange is covered over and protected by an outer skin, love is the unifying dimension of spiritual fruit.



WHAT ARE THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT AND HOW DO WE GROW THEM?

Hope Bolinger

We may have heard the phrase *“the fruit of the spirit”* in church before, but never truly understood the meaning of the verses found in **Galatians 5:22-23**.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law.

In these, Paul lists **nine attributes** of the Holy Spirit, which appear in Christians when they are indwelt by him. In other words, when God indwells us, and we spend more time with him, we begin to emanate his attributes. This is just like when we spend more time with a person, we begin to look and sound like them.

- *But why are these singular? In other words, why isn't it the “fruits” of the Spirit?*
- *Why these nine, and why does this bear an importance on the church today?*

FIRST OFF, WHAT ARE THE NINE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT?

The nine hallmarks of the spirit working in a Christian's life are: **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**.

- **Love** heads the list. Because God is love (**1 John 4:7-21**). Love is the most important out of these nine.
*Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His One and Only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and His love is perfected in us. This is how we know that we remain in Him, and He in us: He has given assurance to us from His Spirit. And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent His Son as the world's Savior. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—God remains in him and he in God. And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. In this, love is perfected with us so that we may have confidence in the Day of Judgment, for we are as He is in this world. There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen. And we have this command from Him: The one who loves God must also love his brother. **1 John 4:7-21 HCSB***

Without it, our good works have no use on earth (**1 Corinthians 13:1**).

If I speak human or angelic languages but do not have love, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

1 Corinthians 13:1 HCSB

But what about the others? Why did Paul choose these in the list and no other admirable attributes? Let's break each of them down.

- **Joy**, first of all, goes deeper than a mere happiness, says Ellicott's Commentary. As it further explains, joy comes from the radiance, the brightness of God himself. In such a presence of brightness, we can experience comfort during difficult trials (*“When I am filled with cares, your comfort brings me joy. **Psalms 94:19**”*).
- **Peace** goes hand in hand with this attribute. Peace extends to others and our inner selves. With it, we have comfort in knowing God heals this broken world.

Love, joy, and peace appear to go together. *It shows our relationship with God.* When we spend time with God, we are full of love, full of heavenly joy, and full of peace.

The next three, according to MacLaren Expositions, get lumped into a triad: **patience, kindness, and goodness**. These especially manifest themselves in **our relationships with others** (opposed to the first three showing up more in our relationship with God). Instead of choosing to retaliate, we endure sufferings and choose to love others. We refuse to add to the fire of antagonism.

Our final triad: **gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control**, refers to **how we handle opposition**. When we face temptation or people who attempt to sway us from righteous living or from Christ himself, we lean on these three virtues.

SO WHY “FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT” INSTEAD OF “FRUITS”?

As Christians, we may get tempted to focus on one fruit at a time. “Today I’ll work on patience. Tomorrow, self-control.” But the Holy Spirit does not work like that. When we submit to God fully and allow him to transform us, all of this fruit should appear in our lives. We are more patient with our dealings with others, joy fills us more, we exercise more self-control, etc.

WHY DO CHRISTIANS NEED FRUIT?

A particularly jarring passage happens in Matthew 21:18-22.

Early in the morning, as He was returning to the city, He was hungry. Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He went up to it and found nothing on it except leaves. And He said to it, “May no fruit ever come from you again!” At once the fig tree withered. When the disciples saw it, they were amazed and said, “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” Jesus answered them, “I assure you: If you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you tell this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ it will be done. And if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.” **Matthew 21:18-22 HCSB**

When Jesus finds a fig tree with no fruit, he curses the tree. Later that day, the tree withers and dies. It may seem like an extreme reaction from Jesus, especially since figs weren’t exactly in season during the time of the encounter with the tree (**Mark 11:12-25**).

The next day when they came out from Bethany, He was hungry. After seeing in the distance a fig tree with leaves, He went to find out if there was anything on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. He said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again!” And His disciples heard it. They came to Jerusalem, and He went into the temple complex and began to throw out those buying and selling in the temple. He overturned the money changers’ tables and the chairs of those selling doves, and would not permit anyone to carry goods through the temple complex. Then He began to teach them: “Is it not written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves!” Then the chief priests and the scribes heard it and started looking for a way to destroy Him. For they were afraid of Him, because the whole crowd was astonished by His teaching. And whenever evening came, they would go out of the city. Early in the morning, as they were passing by, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. Then Peter remembered and said to Him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that You cursed is withered.” Jesus replied to them, “Have faith in God. I assure you: If anyone says to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, all the things you pray and ask for—believe that you have received them, and you will have them. And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing.” **Mark 11:12-25 HCSB**

But here Jesus illustrates **the importance of fruit in the life of a believer**. We all know the cliché: *you can talk the talk, but can you walk the walk?* Jesus calls us to do more than proclaim ourselves to be Christians.

Many Christians will stop after they say a sinner’s prayer. They often forget that **committing your life to Christ requires a full-life commitment**. When we accept Jesus as your Savior, we have to allow him to change areas of our lives that don’t reflect his plan for us and for our world. He will purge selfishness, impatience, unkindness, etc.

A LACK OF FRUIT IN A CHRISTIAN'S LIFE SHOWS A WANING (OR EVEN LACK) OF A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

When we lack fruit, we:

- **BECOME SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE DEVIL'S LIES AND SCHEMES.** After all, if we don't spend time with God, we'll forget what he's like, or why we should care about his plan for us.
- **DON'T DISPLAY CHRIST CORRECTLY TO THE WORLD.** Many times, non-Christians will avoid asking questions about the Christian faith because they've encountered believers who lack fruit. Believers who are rude, mean, selfish, or lacking in any of the *fruit of the spirit* can deter people who may have otherwise investigated Christianity more.
- **FALL INTO SIN AND TEMPTATION MORE.**

There are **fruit of the flesh** (sin)

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I tell you about these things in advance—as I told you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21

...as well as **fruit of the Spirit**,

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23

We need to avoid the former at all costs.

HOW DO WE ACQUIRE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT?

Christians can often have the misconception that they have to earn the fruit of the Spirit. Maybe if they gave more at church or spent more time doing community service, then they will learn patience, or gentleness, or goodness. This is simply not the case.

- **WE MUST FIRST GO TO GOD AND SPEND MORE TIME WITH HIM. WE MUST ANALYZE SCRIPTURE AND LEARN ALL WE CAN ABOUT OUR CREATOR.**

We'll see his love, joy, peace, etc. and how he has blessed us. When we do so, we cannot help but love others. We cannot help but exercise faithfulness. Because we see a good God, and we allow that good God to change us from the inside out. Inside out. Not the other way around.

- **WE MUST SECOND SURRENDER OURSELVES TO HIM.**

Even if we have made a lifelong commitment to him before now, **we need to surrender ourselves to his will daily.** This means allowing him to transform us, even when it hurts. Christians must stop trying to "polish up" their lives before submitting to the Spirit, writes Vern Nicolette for Active Christianity.

*Trying to grow fruit without the Holy Spirit is like trying to grow fruit on an uprooted tree. **WE NEED THE HOLY SPIRIT TO WATER US AND SUSTAIN US BEFORE WE CAN START PRODUCING FRUIT.***

ULTIMATELY, WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Christians don't always succeed at growing fruit. We can stumble into sin and lose sight of the character of Christ in our actions. However, **we should be seeing a steady growth.** When looking back on our formative Christian years, we should see how we've **grown** to be more patient, kind, joyful, loving, etc. If we see a lack of growth over a long period of time, it may be time to spend more time with God and seek him earnestly.

One song always stood out to me at church: **"They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love."**

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord;

*We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord;
And we pray that all unity will one day be restored.
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

*We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand;
We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand;
And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land.
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

*We Will work with each other, we will work side by side;
We will work with each other, we will work side by side;
And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride.
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

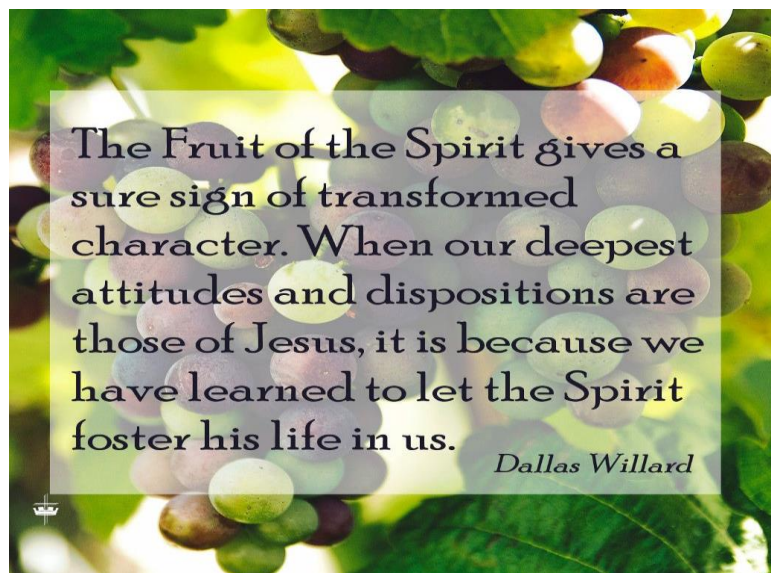
*All praise to the Father, from whom all things come;
And all praise to Christ Jesus, His only Son.
And all praise to the Spirit who makes us one.
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

Many people don't know Christians by their love.

As pointed out in **"The Case for Faith"** by Lee Strobel, the Christians of the early church managed to convert so many to the faith because of their kindness. They:

- Loved the unloved,
- Cared for the marginalized
- Emulated Jesus.

Others saw Jesus in them and wanted to have the same **hope**, the same **joy**, and the same **peace** they experience. As believers, we want nonbelievers to see the same in us. **WE DO SO BY SPENDING MORE TIME WITH GOD.**



6 REASONS PURSUING THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT STILL MATTERS

Kirstyn Mayden

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things, there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

Christ lived out these traits in His everyday life, and *we are to strive to do the same as we spiritually mature*. Believers are not able to live out each trait without *staying connected to Christ*. Our flesh will fail us, and we will fall short in our attempts. We must rely on *the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit to help us* live out each fruit with courage, conviction, and boldness. Each fruit is *produced, nurtured, and developed* over time. In order to live out each fruit consistently, we must *continue to surrender our desires to God’s will and trust Him*. As we grow and continue to imitate Christ’s nature, we will activate and strengthen living out the fruit of the Spirit each day. The fruit of the Spirit is not an outdated list of traits, but are *active, necessary, and relevant* today. In a world where instant success and ambition often reign supreme, it is essential that we continue to live out each fruit of the Spirit with boldness and conviction.

1. WE NEED RESTORATION AND HOPE IN A BROKEN WORLD

Living out the fruit the Spirit represents an opportunity for God’s hope and restoration to permeate each believer. When challenges and difficulties attempt to consume us, we can depend on God’s spirit to help us respond with love, joy, peace, patience, and gentleness. It is so easy to allow our spirits to be burdened and broken down from life circumstances. Overcome your brokenness by living out the fruit of the spirit daily. Our faithfulness to God should not be dependent on our brokenness, but on our gratitude.

3. EACH FRUIT REMINDS US THERE IS ANOTHER WAY TO RESPOND

Practicing the fruit of the spirit encourages us and others that there is another way to respond, behave, and live. Living out each fruit requires us to pause, pray to God for wisdom, and allow God to give us courage to choose differently. We have the responsibility to live out each fruit with a desire to choose a higher path and one that glorifies God and brings hope to others.

5. THE WORLD NEEDS PEOPLE WITH STRONGER CHARACTER AMIDST

CONFUSION: In a world of ongoing confusion and strife, living out the fruit of the spirit is necessary to continue to be men and women of strong character. Our character and how we respond to varying situations is essential as believers to stay encouraged, and serve as a testimony to others who are struggling. Living out the fruit of the Spirit consistently produces stronger character, endurance, and grace within the believer. Where there is confusion, we desperately need to walk in peace. Where there is division, the overflowing love of Christ builds up and doesn’t tear down. Where there is anxiety, we seek God’s patience. Where there is hate, we seek to live out God’s goodness and kindness.

2. EACH FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT REPRESENTS CHRIST LIVING INSIDE OF

YOU: We cannot live out the fruit of the spirit on our own. Living out each fruit represents God working in and through you. It is another reason to give God praise for activating the fruit of the Spirit in your life. When we make decisions to live out our lives with more love, joy, peace, or patience, we are allowing Christ to shine through with our behaviors or actions. While our flesh will want to rise up and respond to different situations with haste, God’s spirit will slow us down and provide us with strength to live out the fruit of the Spirit.

4. GOD’S SPIRIT IS LIVING AND ACTIVE; OUR FLESH IS WEAK

The good news is that each fruit of the Spirit represents the active and dynamic nature of God. Apart from Christ, our flesh is weak and we must rely on God’s spirit to strengthen and encourage us to live out each fruit willingly, without compulsion. We are not called to live out each fruit of the spirit simultaneously, but we have the active power to represent Christ better when we respond with each fruit.

6. WE NEED TO STRENGTHEN OUR ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS BY

LIVING OUT EACH FRUIT CONSISTENTLY: As we rely on God’s spirit to strengthen and encourage us to live out each fruit consistently, we will find that our attitudes and behaviors will align more with Christ. Our households, relationships, and spiritual lives will strengthen, as well as our personal development. Living out the fruit of the spirit is not a one-time occurrence, but a daily, renewing process that involves surrender, dedication and commitment.

Living out each fruit of the Spirit is not a legalistic command by God, but **an open invitation** for us to *choose differently, represent God better, develop stronger character, strengthen our attitudes, and restore hope in a broken world*. When we fall short within our own strength, it is God’s Holy Spirit that we must rely on for encouragement and strength to start anew. Whether it is *love, joy, peace, patience, forbearance, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, or self-control*, we all have an opportunity to live out the positive traits of Christ each day.

THE FRUIT WE BEAR WILL BE A WITNESS TO THE WORLD THAT THE GOD WE SERVE IS FAITHFUL.