

The Fruit of the Spirit

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Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Would you like to be a person like this? I would! Then you want the fruit of the Spirit. What is the fruit of the Spirit? Why is it so difficult to produce? How do we bear it?

The Fruit of the Spirit

The fruit of the Spirit is: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (22-23).* Our impulse is to immediately start singling them out—Kindness, check.

Faithfulness, check plus. Patience, urr. But consider for a moment this is the *fruit* not the *fruits* of the Spirit. Singular not plural. What difference does that really make? Here's the first thing you want to know about the fruit: **grows together**. Take the first and last of the fruit: love and self-control. Say we think of ourselves as a generally loving people. We harbor no hatred towards anyone, wish the best for most. But we have this sneaky compulsion to eat too much, drink too much, spend too much, complain too much. A *lack* of self control. How are we loving *God* in those moments? We're not; we're loving food, drink, stuff, comfort (or what we think those things will give us) *more* than we're loving God himself. But if we're truly loving God, then we'll be self-controlled in those areas. Why? Because God

gives us, in spades, what we find in fractions everywhere else. Here's the point: *Love and self-control, and everything else in between, grow together.* Show me a person who is truly loving, and I'll show you a person of self-control. Because they're satisfied in God, they don't have to indulge elsewhere. Fruit not fruits. The tide of the Spirit raises all ships. Now *why* does the fruit of the Spirit grow together? Because it belongs to Christ: **grows toward Christ.** The fruit of the Spirit isn't some kind of virtue buffet where we pick and choose what we want; it is the very character of Christ. *That's* why it's so appealing. This fruit, this juicy, moral goodness is the loveliness of Christ. So instead of picking it apart, to commend or condemn ourselves, the Spirit directs our attention to the loveliness of Jesus. He is the perfect embodiment of the Spirit's fruit. He is not just one; he's *all*. To touch on a few: **In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins** (1 Jn 4:10); **joy**, Luther said, means sweet thoughts of Christ which inspire, instruct and refresh us; **Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts** (Col 3:6). The fruit of the Spirit shines, dazzles in the face of Jesus. Love, joy, peace radiate in us when we are riveted on the Source. When I buy my wife flowers and put them next to the sink, inevitably, they bend towards a window in the living room. Why? Drawn to the light. So the Spirit draws us to the glory of Christ. So, if you're not spending time with Christ, admiring Christ, trusting

in the promises of Christ, you won't bear much fruit. You won't be lovely, fruitful, Christlike. If you are spending time with Christ, his character will follow. Now that's not to say it doesn't involve work, because it does, which brings us to our second point. If the fruit of the Spirit is so great, why is it so hard to produce?

Why is it Hard?

Perhaps one reason bearing the fruit of the Spirit is difficult is that it's **essential not optional**. We don't like to be told what's mandatory, to be told what to do. And yet, faith is essentially admission *we* don't know what's best, but *Jesus* does. Jesus shows us *and* commands us: *walk* by the Spirit; live by the Spirit; keep in step with the Spirit. Why? To produce the fruit of the Spirit! Take ***gentleness***. Who doesn't appreciate a gentle person? Say you're in an argument. Someone says something that angers you. You can jab back or respond gently. If you respond gently, it can diffuse the situation. Proverbs, "a gentle answer turns away wrath." But you say I'm not that Enneagram number! Christ says, too bad, you're still responsible to be gentle! The fruit of the Spirit is not an personality number; it is the glory of Christ. *It's essential not optional.* A fruitful person is also ***patient***. But you say, I have certain gifts; I'm administrative; service-minded. I like to be efficient, get things done. Say people and questions keep interrupting your efficiency, your

work. Let them have it so you can get on being your gifted self! No, be patiently administrative, patient in your service. We must be cautious of focusing so much on spiritual gifts we fail to produce spiritual fruit. John Stott said something like, While it's true there are *diverse gifts*; the Spirit produces the *same fruit* in all his people. A second reason bearing the fruit is hard is because of **our foe—the flesh**. Verse 17: *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.* Paul acknowledges an adversary to the Spirit, and it's not the Devil; it's *the flesh*. The flesh is our fallen human person *apart from the renewing influence of the Spirit*. It's what we do when we're not yielding to the Spirit: *sexual immorality, jealousy, anger, drunkenness*, to name a few (19-21). You have a foe. Look at the list. Which is characteristic of your flesh? Do you have a plan of attack or are you caught by surprise over and over again? There's this odd idea floating around in Christianity that if you read the Bible and go to church you'll suddenly be like Jesus. But we would never say of someone who wants to be entrepreneur. If you office out of Capitol Factory, go to entrepreneur meet-ups, that does not make you an entrepreneur. To be an entrepreneur you have to roll up your sleeves and do the work. It's also true of Christianity. Showing up

doesn't make you like Jesus. To be like Christ, we have to put in the work.

Walking in the Spirit

How do we do it? Bear the fruit and blast the flesh. 1) **Feed the desires of the Spirit.** Verse 17: *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh.*

There are competing desires. The person who walks in the Spirit feeds the Spirit's desires. What does he desire?—Christ! The Spirit-filled person feeds on Christ. He directs his attention to the glories of Christ, to the loveliness of Christ, to the promises of Christ, to the movements of Christ in the Gospels, and makes space to just marvel at Him. And say, Spirit make me like Christ. John Stott, a single man, and devoted preacher in London used to pray every day, "*Holy Spirit I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. He knew that love, joy, peace radiate in us when we are riveted on the Source. Get close to the Light.*" 2) **Starve the Flesh.** If you're feeding yourself all that fleshly stuff, day and night, you will not bear fruit. And if you keep doing it you will not enjoy the kingdom of God *which is righteousness, joy and peace in the Spirit.* We've gotta starve the flesh. What does that mean? If *sexual immorality* is your fleshly

thing, then skip the shows, the movies, the feeds, the follows that tempt you. Block it, cancel it, kill it. [Cut it out!] Starve that thing to death. If **envy** is your fleshly thing, gotta starve comparison. When someone better looking, more successful, better parent comes along, and you feel the tug of envy, catch yourself and turn your attention away from comparing. Start praising. Tell them what you admire about them. Send them an email. Stop clicking on that home interior porn. Starve envy. [Work out] But more importantly, ask the Spirit for help. Help me mortify the flesh and bear your fruit Holy Spirit. Fill me and make Christ more lovely to me than so and so. Remember, God gives us in spades what we find in fractions elsewhere. 3) **Preach to Yourself.** Verse 24 puts it like this, **And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh.** If you belong to Jesus, there is a sense in which you have already crucified the flesh. You've said, by faith in Jesus, you're dead to me. Those *who belong to Christ Jesus*. You don't belong to the flesh. That's the old man, the old woman. You are a new person, **For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.** A new creation! The Spirit-filled person reminds herself, "I have value, worth, not based on what I've done or failed to do, but on what Christ has done for me." I belong, not to the flesh but to the Savior! I belong. I have a right to be at his table, to dine in his kingdom, to receive his forgiveness, and to bear his fruit *because I belong to Jesus.*

You belong to Jesus. And the Spirit is with you testifying to the loveliness of Christ: You belong to Jesus Christ. He first loved you. So if we Feed the Spirit, Starve the Flesh, Preach to Ourselves we will bear the fruit of the Spirit.