



# The Fruit of the Spirit

## Kicking It Off:

If you had to learn a new skill tomorrow, would you prefer reading a book about it, watching YouTube videos, or having someone teach you in person?

## Read:

Galatians 5:16-26

## Summary

You know how we're all trying to build a good life? We follow the usual recipe: work hard, get married, buy a house, save money, raise kids. It's like we're all tending our own little vineyards, doing our best to grow something worthwhile. And honestly, there's nothing wrong with wanting these things. A nice house with AC beats sweating through summer nights, right? But here's the thing, all that stuff we build ourselves, even when it works out great, it's temporary. It's like growing grapes that taste pretty good but have this weird aftertaste. Sure, you can make wine from them, but it's not the good stuff. Everything we create on our own eventually fades away or disappoints us somehow.

Now imagine there's another vineyard right next to yours, but this one works totally differently. Instead of you doing all the work, someone else already built it, planted it, and maintains it. All you have to do is connect yourself to it, like a branch grafting onto a healthy vine. When you do that, you start producing completely different fruit, the kind that actually lasts forever and tastes amazing with no bitter aftertaste.

The catch? You have to let go of your own vineyard. You can't run both. It's like trying to drive two cars at once, it just doesn't work. And that's hard because we love being in control. We want to call the shots about our careers, our relationships, our money. But this other way means letting someone else make those calls.

Think about those servants at the wedding in Cana who ran out of wine. Jesus told them to fill up jars with water and serve it to the party host. Sounds crazy, but they did it anyway, and it turned into the best wine anyone had tasted that night. That's what happens when we stop insisting on our own way. The life you're working so hard to build might be good, but it's not the best available. There's something better out there, but you have to be willing to trade in your control for it.

## Significant Quotes from Sermon

- "The problem with sin, the problem with living life on your terms is not because the fruit is bad. It's because the fruit is temporary. The fruit is not everlasting."
- "Walking by the spirit is following his word. It's following his leading. Walking is not saying, 'Okay, this is my plan. This is what we're going to do. And you walk with me, God.' I think a lot of us do this when it comes to planning out our lives. We plan out all of our blueprints of how this is supposed to look and we say, 'God, can you join me in building my vineyard?' That's not what walking by the spirit is."
- "When people ask you, 'Hey, that wine was so good. That was the best wine ever. What's your secret? Where did you guys buy that from?' I think as Christians there's a point where we're like, 'Well, there's no secret. I just did what Jesus told me to do.' There's no secret about how to produce a blessed life. There's no secret formula. I just obeyed him."
- "If you feel like you've been in a spiritual rut, I don't think the answer is coming to church more often. I don't think the answer is you need to go and help at a soup kitchen. I don't think the answer comes in doing something. I think the answer is that if you find yourself in a spiritual rut, spend time with Jesus."

## Discussion Questions

1. **Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?**
2. We often try to build good lives through our own efforts and achievements. **What area of your life do you find yourself trying to control the most instead of surrendering to God?**

3. The fruit we produce on our own may seem sweet but ultimately leaves us unsatisfied. **When have you experienced something you thought would bring lasting happiness but ended up feeling empty or temporary?**
4. True spiritual growth requires letting God prune areas of our lives that hinder fruitfulness. **What is God currently trying to remove from your life that you're holding onto tightly?**
5. Sometimes following God's direction seems irrational or uncomfortable to us and others. **Describe a time when obeying God required you to do something that didn't make sense from a worldly perspective.**
6. Spiritual breakthroughs often come from simply spending time with Jesus rather than doing more religious activities. **How can you create more space in your daily routine to simply be with God without an agenda?**
7. The world offers many substitutes for true salvation, from wealth to politics to technology. **Which alternative "savior" are you most tempted to rely on for security, and how does recognizing this help you refocus on Christ?**

## Sermon Notes

### *Galatians 5:16-26*

<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

## Outline

### I The Gift of Leadership (v.11)

## **I. The Two Vineyards (Works of flesh vs. Fruit of Spirit)**

### **A. First Vineyard: Human Works**

1. Built through personal effort: study hard, get married, have kids, buy house, get good job
2. Requires your work: trellis system, tilled soil, proper watering, sun exposure
3. Problem: produces temporary, bittersweet fruit that eventually decays
4. Not inherently bad, just temporary (AC, vacations, comfort are objectively nice)

### **B. Second Vineyard: Christ's Work**

1. Based on the work of the cross, not personal achievement
2. Produces fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23)
3. Pure, eternal fruit not of this world
4. Cannot be produced through human effort

### **C. Three Categories of Fleshly Works (Gal 5:19-21)**

1. Distorted intimacy: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality
2. Distorted worship: idolatry, sorcery
3. Distorted community: enmity, strife, jealousy, divisions, envy

## **II. The Vine and Branches (Abiding in Christ - John 15:1-8)**

### **A. Christ as the True Vine**

1. "I am the true vine and my Father is the vine dresser" (John 15:1)
2. Branches cannot bear fruit independently
3. "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5)
4. One essential action: abide in Christ

### **B. Walking by the Spirit (Gal 5:16-18)**

1. Same concept as abiding: letting Christ direct your life
2. No longer calling your own shots or making your own plans
3. Requires surrendering control of all life areas: work, marriage, money, parenting

### **C. The Pruning Process**

1. God removes what hinders fruit production
2. Requires consent - God won't force it
3. We resist because we want control, but pruning produces better fruit

4. Holding tightly to certain branches prevents spiritual growth

### **III. The New Wine (Transformation at Cana - John 2:1-11)**

#### **A. Mary's Example**

1. Bring every concern to Jesus, even seemingly trivial ones
2. When Jesus says "my hour has not yet come," she persists
3. Instructs servants: "Do whatever he tells you"

#### **B. The Servants' Obedience**

1. Fill ceremonial washing jars with water (20-30 gallons each)
2. Act of faith: carrying water to the master of ceremonies
3. Following Christ often appears irrational to observers
4. Transformation likely occurred at moment of tasting

#### **C. Results of Obedience**

1. Best wine saved for last - superior to what came before
2. Jesus manifested his glory; disciples believed
3. Servants couldn't take credit - only pointed to Jesus
4. All glory goes to Christ when spiritual fruit appears

### **IV. The Harvest (Living out the fruit in community)**

#### **A. Experiencing Christ's New Wine**

1. Not described as "fine" or "okay" but inspiring worship
2. Produces joy independent of circumstances
3. Restores relationships and reveals life's meaning beyond personal achievement
4. Available to all, not just select few

#### **B. The Choice Before Us**

1. Not about guilt but presenting superior alternative
2. Earthly success inevitably decays; Christ's fruit lasts forever
3. "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish" (John 15:7)
4. Christianity frustrates because it demands surrender of ownership

#### **C. Practical Application**

1. Spiritual growth isn't about doing more (church attendance, Bible study)
2. Answer to spiritual rut: spend time with Jesus
3. Religious activities should lead to obedience, not replace it
4. "Let us also keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:25)

## 5. Fruit of Spirit enhances rather than breaks community

# Notes

Wine serves as a fascinating biblical metaphor, even for those of us who don't particularly enjoy drinking it. Throughout scripture, wine represents blessing and fruit, and the imagery of vineyards permeates many of the most important spiritual teachings. This metaphor becomes especially powerful when we consider how Christ himself explains our salvation and connection to God through the image of a vineyard, with grapes growing on vines that require careful tending. If I were tasked with building a vineyard from scratch, I'd probably start where most of us begin these days: YouTube. We live in an age where tutorials and how-to videos promise to teach us everything from basic home repairs to complex skills. Sometimes the first video isn't helpful, so we move on to the next, and gradually we piece together enough information to move forward. This process of learning and growing has become part of how we navigate life in the modern world. We're all trying to live well, to build good lives for ourselves. There's nothing inherently wrong with this desire. We mark milestones, set goals, and work toward creating stability and happiness. If only there were a simple YouTube tutorial for building a good life, complete with five or ten easy steps that would guarantee prosperity, fulfillment, and abundance. But life resists such simplification. Throughout my life, people have offered various formulas for success. Study hard, they said, and you'll build a good life. Get married, have children, buy a house, secure a good job, and these accomplishments will add up to happiness and fulfillment. Each of these suggestions contains some truth, yet none provides the complete answer we seek.

Imagine two vineyards standing side by side. The first represents your own efforts to build a meaningful life through personal achievement. This vineyard showcases your hard work: the carefully constructed trellis system of wooden supports, the well-tilled and fertilized soil, the proper irrigation, and the optimal sun exposure. Every detail reflects your dedication and planning. You bear full responsibility for this vineyard's success or failure. The fundamental problem with this first vineyard lies not in the quality of your work but in the nature of the fruit it produces. No matter how many twelve-hour days you invest, regardless of your architectural brilliance or agricultural expertise, the fruit remains temporary. It may taste sweet for a

season, but it lacks eternal quality. The bitterness underlying its sweetness reveals its temporal nature. This distinction matters deeply because sin's primary problem isn't that it produces obviously bad fruit. The issue is that sin produces temporary fruit. When we observe successful people who have built impressive lives through their own efforts, we often see them enjoying genuine pleasures: exotic vacations, first-class travel, five-star accommodations, and numerous comforts. These achievements aren't inherently evil. Air conditioning, for instance, makes life more comfortable, and most of us would choose it over discomfort. Yet these accomplishments, however impressive, remain temporary. Life consistently delivers bittersweet experiences, moments that taste good initially but leave us recognizing their incompleteness. This recognition creates a longing for something more substantial, something eternal. The second vineyard operates on entirely different principles. It produces fruit of the spirit, fruit that transcends earthly origin. The great deception many believe is that we can produce this spiritual fruit through our own efforts. We might create convincing imitations, but they're fundamentally different from the genuine article. Consider the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These words aren't foreign to anyone, whether they attend church or not. We've all experienced versions of these qualities. But the spirit possesses the pure, undiluted essence of each, not the pale imitations we manufacture through human effort.

Both vineyards involve work, but the critical difference lies in whose work produces the fruit. In the first vineyard, your efforts directly correlate with the quality of fruit produced. This creates a system of comparison where everyone measures their work against others, judging relative success by visible outcomes. The second vineyard also rests on a foundation of work, but not human work. This vineyard grows from the work accomplished at the cross. The fruit reflects the quality of Christ's work, not our own. Too many of us base our spiritual fruit on personal righteousness, creating elaborate vineyard systems with all the right components, yet still producing only bittersweet fruit because our work remains imperfect. When confronted with this imperfection, we often become defensive. "Nobody's perfect," we protest. "I'm doing my best with what I have." But God examines our fruit and recognizes a fundamental flaw: He cannot create anything eternal from temporary materials. Like a winemaker who requires quality grapes to produce fine wine, God cannot transform our flawed fruit into something worthy of eternity. The fruit of our lives, regardless of how moral or ethical we

strive to be, cannot achieve eternal status through human effort alone. Even the most exemplary life eventually decays and fades from memory. We exist as temporary beings, like wisps of vapor that appear briefly before vanishing.

The exciting message isn't about human work, church work, or personal achievement, because all these efforts produce only temporary results. The transformative message centers on Christ's completed work. Jesus has already established his vineyard, laid the foundation, built the trellis, and planted the vine. Our calling is simply to abide in him. Paul expresses this concept in Galatians when he instructs us to walk by the spirit. Walking by the spirit means we no longer direct our own paths. The spirit calls the shots, and we follow his leading through his word. This isn't about presenting God with our blueprints and asking him to assist in building our personal vineyards. Walking by the spirit requires releasing control and allowing him to lead. The works of the flesh manifest in predictable ways. Paul categorizes them into three distortions: corrupted intimacy, misdirected worship, and broken community. The first category encompasses sexual immorality and impurity, representing attempts to maximize what God has already perfected. The second includes idolatry and sorcery, reflecting our tendency to worship created things rather than the Creator. The third category, comprising enmity, strife, jealousy, and divisions, reveals how fleshly works destroy the community God intended to build. These categories aren't meant to shame us but to help us recognize the inferior fruit our own vineyards produce. When life operates apart from Christ's work and the gospel, we remain trapped in distorted versions of intimacy, worship, and community. We might experience fleeting moments of sweetness in each area, but none achieve eternal significance. The vineyard of Christ transforms these experiences entirely. Intimacy becomes eternal rather than temporary. Worship connects us to the eternal God rather than temporal idols. Community transcends earthly limitations to become an eternal fellowship. The fruit loses its bitter aftertaste and becomes purely, eternally sweet.

Jesus declares himself the true vine and his Father the gardener. Every branch that fails to bear fruit gets removed, while fruitful branches undergo pruning to increase their productivity. The branches cannot bear fruit independently; they must remain connected to the vine. Apart from Christ, we can accomplish nothing of eternal significance. This teaching emphasizes one essential action: abiding in Christ. Paul's instruction to walk by the spirit and Jesus' command to abide in him convey the same truth. The transition from a self-made vineyard focused on personal works to Christ's vineyard



doesn't require complex effort. It simply means existing with Christ, allowing him to direct our lives. The difficulty arises because we prefer maintaining control. We enjoy choosing our own directions and making our own decisions. Even when grafted into Christ's vine, we often resist the spirit's flow through certain areas of our lives. We declare some territories off limits: career choices, marriage decisions, financial management, parenting styles, or Sunday activities. We claim Christian identity while denying Christ authority over significant life areas. This selective surrender explains why some branches produce no fruit. We wonder why our lives lack spiritual fruit while simultaneously refusing to grant God complete authority. We remain attached to our own vineyards while expecting to receive the benefits of Christ's vine. Pruning presents another challenge. When we submit to God and begin abiding in Christ, we expect immediate blessing and abundant fruit. Instead, God often brings out the pruning shears. This isn't what we anticipated. We signed up for blessing, not cutting. Yet pruning remains essential for producing the best fruit. The gardener removes what hinders optimal growth, but this requires our consent. God won't force the process. When we resist pruning, we effectively return to our own vineyards, maintaining control but sacrificing the superior fruit only he can produce.

The wedding at Cana provides a perfect illustration of how spiritual fruit develops. When the wine ran out, Mary approached Jesus with the problem. Her response teaches us two crucial lessons: bring every concern to Jesus, and remain ready to obey his instructions. Mary's actions demonstrate that God desires us to approach him with all our concerns, even seemingly trivial ones. Running out of wine at a wedding might seem insignificant compared to life's major crises, yet Mary brought this social embarrassment to Jesus. When he initially indicated the timing wasn't right, she didn't retreat apologetically. Instead, she instructed the servants to do whatever he commanded. The servants' obedience required tremendous faith. They filled ceremonial washing jars with water, knowing the problem was a wine shortage. These containers weren't designed for wine storage. Yet they obeyed, filling them to the brim. Their next act demanded even greater faith: drawing water from these jars and presenting it to the master of ceremonies. They approached with what they knew was water, trusting Jesus despite the apparent absurdity. Following Christ often appears irrational to outside observers. The world may view our obedience as foolishness, but we persist because we trust the one giving the instructions. The servants' obedience, despite their doubts, resulted in miraculous transformation. The water became the finest wine,

surpassing what had been served earlier. This miracle reveals several truths. First, Jesus performed it to manifest his glory and strengthen his disciples' faith. Second, the servants who obeyed didn't receive credit for the excellent wine. When questioned about its origin, they could only point to Jesus and explain they had simply followed his instructions. Third, the transformation likely occurred at the moment of tasting, not while the servants carried the water. Their faith grew through participating in this miraculous act.

Christ offers new wine that surpasses anything we can produce independently. Many people spend entire lives building personal vineyards and drinking only the mediocre wine of their own making, never realizing something infinitely better exists. Those who have only tasted worldly wine often express disappointment. Careers provide some satisfaction but fall short of expectations. Family brings joy mixed with challenges. Friendships offer companionship but sometimes disappoint. In contrast, those who have experienced Christ's new wine don't describe it in lukewarm terms. They don't say it's "fine" or "okay." The forgiveness of Jesus, the restoration he brings, and fellowship with the spirit inspire songs of worship because this wine satisfies completely. It restores relationships, produces context-independent joy, and reveals life's meaning beyond personal achievement. When we experience the fruit of the spirit in our lives, it enhances rather than destroys community. Because Christ produces this fruit rather than human effort, it's available to all. God desires us to experience true intimacy, genuine worship, and authentic community. Nobody argues against love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control. God wants us to understand that we are neither the gardener nor the vine.

Christianity frustrates many people because it demands surrender of ownership. We must acknowledge that we no longer control our own vineyards. This challenges those who take pride in their accomplishments and want to maintain ownership of what they've built. Yet God promises a harvest that exceeds our imagination. Like the disciples who caught so many fish their nets began breaking after obeying Jesus' seemingly foolish instruction to cast their nets on the boat's other side, God wants us to experience overwhelming abundance. This isn't prosperity gospel that makes material wealth the goal. Instead, abiding in Christ produces eternal fruit that never fades or diminishes. Earthly successes inevitably decay. Money loses value through inflation. Death ends our earning capacity. Societies eventually collapse. In contrast, Christ doesn't promise loss but eternal gain. The fruit produced through abiding in him lasts forever, maintaining its sweetness

throughout eternity. The fruit of the spirit comes from the spirit, not human flesh. Temporary works of the flesh cannot produce eternal fruit. Following the spirit, abiding in Christ, obeying his word, and keeping his simple commandments of loving God and others allows us to produce lasting fruit. Interestingly, the commandment essentially instructs us to partake of the fruit God provides through Christ. Love, the first fruit of the spirit, becomes both the command and the result. For those experiencing spiritual stagnation, the answer isn't increased church attendance or volunteer work. The solution isn't found in doing more but in spending time with Jesus. Attend church to encounter Jesus, not to fulfill an obligation. Join Bible studies to draw closer to Christ and prepare for obedience, not merely to accumulate knowledge. The great danger facing the church is becoming proficient at religious activities while refusing to surrender when the spirit calls. We risk saying, "I can't submit now; I have church to attend" or "I can't surrender; I need to read my Bible." These activities should lead us to greater obedience, not replace it.

The law serves not to prevent obedience but to guide us toward it. As we become more obedient to Christ and abide in him more fully, we experience his eternal fruit increasingly. The choice between the two vineyards isn't complex. On one side stands a distorted version of intimacy, worship, and community that produces temporary, dying fruit marked by broken relationships and empty worship. On the other side grows love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The decision should be obvious, yet we often cling to our inferior vineyards. The goal isn't to generate guilt but to present a superior alternative. Instead of wasting life on temporary achievements, we can invest in eternal fruit. Jesus, the true vine, invites us to be grafted into him. The work required isn't arduous labor but simple abiding, walking with him, and allowing him to direct our paths. The fruit of the spirit represents what God desires for every person. These qualities aren't reserved for super-spiritual individuals but are available to all who choose to abide in Christ rather than rely on personal effort. The temporary pleasures of self-made vineyards pale in comparison to the eternal sweetness found in God's vineyard. The choice remains ours: continue producing bitter, temporary fruit through human effort, or accept the invitation to abide in Christ and bear fruit that lasts forever.

## **BLOG**

Imagine two vineyards growing side by side. One produces bitter fruit that leaves you sick. The other yields fruit so sweet and satisfying you can't help but share it. Paul uses this picture in Galatians 5 when he contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. But here's what strikes me most: we don't get to be neutral observers. We're all producing fruit from one vineyard or the other.

I chose this passage because it answers the question every believer eventually asks: "How should I live now that I'm free in Christ?" Paul's answer should surprise us. He doesn't give us more rules. He doesn't outline a new system of religious performance. Instead, he points us to a person, the Holy Spirit, who transforms our ordinary lives into something more significant.

When Jesus attended a wedding in Cana, He took ordinary water and transformed it into the finest wine. The servants didn't manufacture that wine through effort or technique. They simply filled jars with water and watched Jesus work. That's the same dynamic Paul describes here. The Spirit takes our ordinary human existence and produces something we could never create on our own.

Let's start with what Paul calls "the works of the flesh." Notice he uses the plural "works," suggesting multiple disconnected actions. These aren't just obvious sins. They're the natural produce of human nature operating independently from God. Paul lists fifteen examples, and they fall into three categories. First come the sexual sins: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery. These represent distorted intimacy, our God-given desire for connection twisted into selfish gratification. Next, he mentions idolatry and witchcraft, which might seem outdated until we realize these represent distorted worship. We're created to worship, but apart from the Spirit, we worship created things rather than the Creator. Finally, Paul lists what we might call social sins: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy. These reveal distorted community. We're made for relationships, but sin turns us against each other. These aren't just behaviors we occasionally fall into. They're the default settings of humanity apart from God's transforming work. Paul says these things are "obvious," and he's right. Turn on the news. Scroll through social media. Look honestly at your own heart. The works of the flesh aren't aberrations. They're what naturally grows when we tend the vineyard of human nature.

Paul's warning should shake us: "Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." He's not teaching salvation by good behavior. He's already

spent four chapters establishing that we're justified by faith alone. But he's making clear that genuine faith produces different fruit. A branch connected to Christ doesn't produce the same fruit as one growing wild.

Paul shifts from plural "works" to singular "fruit." The Greek word *karpos* suggests organic growth, something that develops naturally from within. The Spirit doesn't produce nine different fruits but one fruit with nine flavors. This unity matters. You can't have Spirit-produced love without patience. You can't have joy without gentleness. They grow together like a cluster of grapes. Look at this fruit carefully. Love, joy, and peace flow from our relationship with God. When the Spirit fills us, we experience God's love, share His joy, and rest in His peace. These aren't emotional states we work up. They're the overflow of communion with Him. Patience, kindness, and goodness flow outward toward others. The Spirit doesn't make us spiritual hermits. He produces fruit that blesses everyone around us. We become patient with difficult people because the Spirit reminds us of God's patience with us. We show kindness not to earn points but because kindness flows from hearts touched by God's kindness. We do good to others because the Spirit aligns our hearts with God's generous heart. Faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control shape our inner character. Faithfulness means reliability over time. Gentleness translates a word that meant strength under control, like a powerful horse responding to its rider's lightest touch. Self-control doesn't mean white-knuckled restraint but Spirit-empowered freedom from our destructive impulses.

Paul adds, "Against such things there is no law." Laws exist to restrain evil. No society needs laws against being too loving or too joyful. When the Spirit produces His fruit in us, we fulfill the law's true intent without needing its restrictions. We become the kind of people laws were trying to create but never could.

But how does this transformation happen? Paul tells us to "walk by the Spirit." The present tense suggests continuous action. This isn't a one-time decision but a lifestyle. Walking implies steady progress in a chosen direction. Every day, sometimes every moment, we choose whether to walk according to the flesh or according to the Spirit. This brings us to verse 17, where Paul describes an internal conflict every believer knows: "The flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want." Some people read this as Paul describing perpetual failure, but that misses his point. He's explaining why walking by the Spirit matters. These two powers

oppose each other. When we walk by the Spirit, He prevents us from doing what our flesh wants. The conflict exists, but we're not helpless victims.

Jesus' teaching about the vine and branches brings explanation to Paul's message. In John 15, Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." Fruit comes from abiding, not striving. A branch doesn't grunt and strain to produce grapes. It simply stays connected to the vine, and fruit happens. This explains why so many Christians exhaust themselves trying to manufacture spiritual fruit. We think if we try harder to be patient, we'll become patient. If we work at being gentle, we'll achieve gentleness. But you might as well try turning water into wine by stirring really fast. Transformation requires something beyond human effort.

Going back to the wedding at Cana, the servants actively participated. They filled the jars with water. They drew some out and carried it to the master of ceremonies. But they didn't create the wine. Only Jesus could transform water into wine. We participate in the Spirit's work through obedience, but we don't produce the fruit. The Spirit does. Notice something else about that miracle. Jesus didn't create cheap wine. The master of ceremonies said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." When God transforms something, He doesn't do minimal work. The fruit of the Spirit surpasses the highest human virtue. Spirit-produced love goes deeper than human affection. Spirit-produced joy transcends circumstantial happiness. Spirit-produced peace surpasses understanding.

Paul gives us a crucial insight in verse 24: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Note the past tense. This happened when we came to Christ. We made a decisive break with the flesh's dominion. But like any death certificate, what's legally true must be lived out daily. We don't crucify the flesh again and again. We live in light of what already happened.

Paul concludes with practical instruction: "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." The Greek word *stoicheo* means to walk in line, like soldiers in formation or dancers following choreography. The Spirit sets the pace and direction. We follow His lead. This matters in community. Paul warns against becoming conceited, provoking one another, and envying one another. These are the opposite of spiritual fruit. When we're out of step with the Spirit, we compare and compete. When we're in step, we complement and complete each other. The fruit of the Spirit creates beautiful community.

When we walk by the Spirit, He produces fruit we could never manufacture. But here's what I've learned: this transformation rarely happens overnight. Unlike the instant miracle at Cana, spiritual fruit usually grows slowly. We need patience with ourselves and others.

We also need honesty about which vineyard we're tending. It's easy to mistake personality traits for spiritual fruit. Some people are naturally easygoing and think they have Spirit-produced patience. Others are naturally upbeat and confuse this with spiritual joy. But personality traits fail under pressure. When the naturally patient person faces real provocation, human patience runs out. When the cheerful person faces genuine tragedy, human happiness crumbles. Only the Spirit's fruit endures.