

You Are What Your Fruit Says You Are

Luke 6:43-45

(Discussion Guide on pg.11)

Are you a good judge of character? I was listening to a radio station recently and the radio host was taking a call from a listener. The caller, who I don't think was a Christian, asked for advice about whether to date a friend who she cared about deeply but wasn't physically attracted to. The radio host said to the listener: "Over the years, I've never dated a man who I was not physically attracted to. The problem is that they all turned out to be losers."

How many of you know, if you desire to have healthy relationships, make good life decisions, and become a person of integrity, you must learn to be a good judge of character. None of us will always get it right. I'm sure most of us have had an experience where we trusted someone who turned out to be very untrustworthy. Sometimes people learn from these experiences and sometimes people are so hurt by them that they have a hard time trusting anyone.

Being a good judge of character doesn't mean being cynical or naïve. But it does mean that we need to develop a level of discernment that is informed by the word of God and supercharged by the Holy Spirit.

As we saw last week, the exhortation by Jesus to *judge not, and you will not be judge*, which is one of the most misapplied passages of scripture, doesn't mean that we should suspend all our critical faculties that enable us to discern right from wrong or to determine whether we can trust someone with a high level of responsibility or influence. Neither does it mean that we should never correct someone when they're wrong or speak out against injustice. What Jesus was speaking of was a self-righteous, judgmental, unforgiving disposition that looks down on others—that sees the faults and failures of others but is blind to their own.

As Christians we are called to represent the values of God's kingdom, which are a complete reversal of the values of this world. Moreover, we are called to make disciples of Christ who also represent these

values rooted in the love of Christ. Therefore, to be powerful change agents for Christ we must be able to examine our own character and the character of others, especially those who are given spiritual authority and influence over our lives.

We are to honor godly leaders, but we are not to follow them blindly, lest as Jesus warned in Luke 6:39, we both fall into the pit—into destruction. When it comes to choosing the leaders that we follow, or evaluating our own leadership, we must be careful not to value talent over character. Doing so has devastating consequences, as the far too many stories of fallen leaders, and the trail of hurt they leave behind, can attest too.

Main idea: A good judge of Christian character looks for the fruit that is produced from being rooted in Christ.

To unfold this theme, we are going to consider what it takes to discern and develop the character of one who represents God’s kingdom and why it matters infinitely more than your looks, money you have in the bank, or exceptional talents.

1. Our typical behavior (fruit) reveals our true character (heart condition)

To begin with: Our typical behavior reveals our true character. Having explained that we must take the log out of our eye, before we can take the speck out of our brother’s eye, meaning that we must deal with our own stuff to have the credibility and discernment to help others deal with their stuff, Jesus says:

“For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush.” Luke 6:43-44

Keep in mind that this good tree and worthless tree metaphor Jesus gives is found in the context of His teaching on the values of His kingdom. Moreover, the values of the kingdom of God, like an

exceptional kind of love not only shapes our character but they authenticate and mark us as Kingdom representatives. They give us the credibility needed as disciples of Jesus to preach the gospel and make disciples of Jesus.

This is why Jesus explained in the previous verse: *“first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.”*

To be change agents for Christ in the world and especially in our homes, character matters. Our character matters more than our knowledge of the bible or our ability to eloquently articulate biblical truth. Let me be clear, I'm not saying knowledge of the word doesn't matter. As we will see more later, the word of God is what should be feeding our faith and shaping our character.

But it's possible to have biblical knowledge and the ability to articulate sound doctrine without bearing the fruit of exceptional character—of a life transformed by the grace of Christ. And it's being able to display exceptional character, especially exceptional love that will have the greatest impact in our lives.

Again, it is in this context that Jesus gives his metaphor of the good tree, and the bad tree or worthless tree. And the point is: the outward fruit a person bears or the character that a person displays comes out of his inner life—who He is on the inside.

If the tree is healthy and is receiving the life-giving nourishment it needs from its root system, it's going to bear good fruit. If the tree is not healthy, if it's diseased, or its roots are not supplying adequate nourishment, the fruit is going to be bad.

Both the condition of the tree or the type of tree is revealed by its fruit. You can't expect, Jesus said, to get figs or grapes from worthless trees or bushes that do not have the inherent DNA to produce fruit.

In light of Jesus' good tree, bad tree metaphor, let me ask you, what kind of fruit are you bearing? Are you a prickly person—someone who

is easily irritated or agitated by others, or someone who is liable to cause someone to take offense because of your abrasive, harsh, and quick-tempered disposition? Or are you a kind, patient, and tenderhearted person?

Pastor, that's just not my personality. How many of you know, that's not an excuse for your behavior, it's an indictment? This is what Jesus is getting at. Your fruit, the manner in which you communicate and your actions reveal your true character, who you really are.

I grew up in a home with a father who was quick tempered. You could easily set him off, which caused major hurt and damage to our home. Although he occasionally did some nice things, often he did so to make up for the hurt that he caused because of his lack of self-control.

I love my dad. I'm not bitter or resentful towards him. I forgave him a long time ago for the hurt and pain he was responsible for. But can I tell you, the occasional nice things that he did could not make up for his lack of self-control. In fact, the fruit of self-control would have been one of the greatest gifts he could have ever given to us as a father.

My father was a hardworking man who put food on the table and a roof over our heads. I'm grateful for that. But a lot of the good that he did was overshadowed by a major character flaw, namely that he was a volcano always ready to erupt. And my mom, who was an exceptional mother, absorbed much of the pain that came from those eruptions.

It's been said, your character is not revealed by your occasional or exceptional behavior; it's revealed by your typical and consistent behavior. My father was known by friends and family for his explosiveness. But what I know now that I didn't know then is that my father's outer behavior was the fruit of an inner heart condition. And what he needed most was not behavior modification, but a spiritual heart transplant.

Beloved, when we trust Christ as Savior and Lord, we are new creations in Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to reside in our hearts to

change us from the inside out. If we are true disciples of Jesus, if He is truly dwelling in us it will show on the outside. We will never be sinless this side of heaven. But as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus, we will sin less. As we daily die to self by the power of the Spirit, the resurrection life of Jesus will shine through more and more.

Again, the meaning of Jesus' metaphor that the tree is known by its fruit means that our behavior demonstrates whether we are truly His disciples. What are the behaviors or the fruit that marks us as true disciples of Jesus?

In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul explains that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. If you are truly a disciple in whom the Spirit of God dwells, these are the character qualities that should consistently and increasingly be evident in your life.

Moreover, these are the qualities that ought to be exceptionally evident in those who we give spiritual authority and influence over our lives, such as a Pastor.

"A religious teacher or a church pastor who is not growing in these [spiritual qualities of the Spirit] is likely a blind guide, whatever they say and no matter what their reputation is. A professing Christian who is not growing in these things needs to ask themselves whether they really are a disciple of Jesus, whatever their involvement in their church and no matter how often they say their prayers" Alistair Begg

Let me be clear, we are not saved by taking on the fruit of the Spirit, rather the fruit is the proof that the Spirit has taken over our hearts and is directing our lives. And this inward work of the Spirit, which is producing the outward fruit of exceptional character, is what we must value above all when choosing a mate or the spiritual leaders we follow.

Along these lines, I read something recently that I'm going to Christianize for you: The reason many women can't find a man who

wears the armor of Christ is because she keeps falling for the fool in aluminum foil.

When we prioritize looks over character in searching for a mate or competency over character in the leaders that we follow, we open ourselves up to deception, disillusionment, and devastation. While physical attraction may be alluring, it's character that ultimately determines the success of a relationship. Likewise, although competency is important, the character of leaders will make the greatest difference in those under their spiritual oversight and it's what will carry them to the finish line.

2. Our spoken words spring from what fills our hearts

Now, the second principle for discerning and developing the godly character that will make us change agents for the kingdom is: our spoken words spring from what fills our hearts. Jesus says:

“The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” Luke 6:45

I've heard it said that your tongue will tattle on your heart. Jesus affirms this and more. The words that come from your lips will reveal the condition of your heart, who you really are on the inside. As we will examine more in a moment, you are what your heart treasures, and what your heart is full of will be manifested in your words.

What are you storing in your heart? What are you hiding in your heart? What is occupying your heart? The qualities that we exhibit which people around us can see come from the stuff in our hearts that people can't see and that sometimes we try to hide.

It's notable that when Jesus speaks about the good and evil that comes from our lives and that springs from our hearts, he focuses on our words. He focuses on our words for at least two reasons:

Number one, our words provide the primary empirical evidence of the true condition of our hearts. And two, our words have the greatest potential to bring healing or to cause great harm.

James, the half-brother of Jesus said this about the tongue: *“How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.”* James 3:5b-6

“The misuse of the tongue”, says one bible teacher, “is perhaps the easiest way to sin. There are some sins that an individual may not be able to commit simply because he does not have the opportunity. But there are no limits to what one can say, no built-in restraints or boundaries. In Scripture, the tongue is variously described as wicked, blasphemous, foolish, boasting, complaining, cursing, contentious, sensual and vile. And that list is not exhaustive. No wonder God put the tongue in a cage behind the teeth, walled in by the mouth!” John MacArthur

How many of you know from experience, although God put the tongue in a cage behind the teeth, those human bars aren't strong enough to keep the tongue from escaping and inflicting some serious damage to our relationships and hurting our credibility as followers of Jesus.

We can try really hard to keep the tongue in its cage, but the reality is that whatever is filling our hearts will unleash the tongue—the truth about our hearts will be manifested by our words.

Do you recognize that your tongue keeps escaping its cage and you want to put a stop to it? If you want your tongue to be released only to do good and not evil, then you need to look to your heart. Your tongue can't be controlled by will power alone, but your tongue can again reveal what's in your heart. Your tongue can assist you in determining the spiritual maladies in your heart.

If you have a harsh or critical tongue, it's likely that you have anger or bitterness in your heart. If you have a boastful tongue, it's very likely

that your heart is full of pride or self-righteousness. If you have a judgmental tongue, it can be that your heart is full of insecurity.

As we saw last week, judgmental people who often criticize others behind their backs, do so to feel better about themselves. Beloved your ungracious words are telling on you, their screaming that you have a heart issue—they are revealing that you have some bad treasure stored in your heart.

This brings us to our final point:

3. Our works and words are shaped by what we treasure

Again, Jesus said in His sermon on the plain: *“The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”* Luke 6:45

What are you treasuring up or storing up in your heart? You know, the things we put away for safekeeping are typically things that we value. We put money in the bank. We store family heirlooms where they are kept safe and preserved. We put valuables in a safe. Sometimes we invest money in a mutual fund or a retirement fund that we believe will gain interest. But there’s a place in our lives where we store what we value the most, namely our hearts.

Beloved, whatever you are storing up in your heart or the things in your heart you value the most will shape your character and your character will determine the actions you take and the words you speak. Your typical behavior and the general pattern of your words, and manner in which you utter them show who you truly are.

Again, they show who we truly are because they flow from what we are treasuring up in our hearts—or what we value most. And you are what you treasure the most—you are what you worship.

Earlier I said that if you have a judgmental or ungracious tongue it can be that your heart is full of insecurity. What makes people insecure?

Insecurity can be the result of finding your ultimate identity or the things you value most outside of your relationship with God, which by the way is idolatry.

If you find your identity in your appearance, or in your performance, or if you find your ultimate value and security in money, then whenever something or someone appears to threaten any of those idols, you will be filled with insecurity. And when insecurity is filling your heart, it will often manifest in ungracious words and actions.

On the other hand, when you find your ultimate identity in your relationship with Christ and treasure Him above all, you will be filled with a security that is not dependent on outside sources or yourself. When your primary identity and ultimate security is found in the love of Jesus, which He demonstrated by laying His life down to save us from our sins and reconcile us to God, we will be filled with His love. And when His love is filling our hearts, it will spill over and manifest in self-giving actions and gracious speech that builds people up.

Elaborating on this passage, Alister Begg writes: “The general tone and content of our words show what we truly are. Of course, none of us are perfect in what we say (James 3:8). But words that are angry, divisive, proud, condemnatory, and so on should be aberrations—deviations from the norm. The hallmarks of our speech, every day, in every situation, should be gentleness, generosity, humility, and kindness.

And this applies to our teachers too. Of course, our pastors are not perfect; they are sheep in need of a shepherd and sinners in need of a Savior, just like every Christian. We must not hold them to a standard of perfection and condemn them when they fall short. But over time, over the long haul, we must be able to say of our teachers, ‘Their character and the content of their speech, while not perfect, are trending in the right direction. They are honest and contrite before the Scriptures. They are kind and humble in their speech. We can see the Spirit’s work in their character.’ No one can lead souls heavenward unless they are climbing themselves; they may have a long way to go, but they must be moving upwards.”

Beloved, to be powerful change agents for Christ in our homes and in our circles of influence, people don't need to see that we are perfect, but that we are real. Being real and authentic followers of Jesus not only means bearing the fruit of Christ-like character, but when we fall short being quick to own up to it and to seek God's forgiveness and the forgiveness of others.

It's been said, character is better caught than taught. One of the most powerful ways we can be an influence for good and effect positive change is to humble ourselves and admit when we are wrong.

We will never reach sinless perfection this side of heaven, but we can continually make progress in becoming more, and more like Christ. But this spiritual progress depends on what is filling our hearts or what we are storing up in our hearts. Again, Jesus said: *"The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil,"* Luke 6:45a

What are we storing up and treasuring in our hearts? To continually progress in our Spiritual lives and bear the fruit of the Spirit, we must store up God's word in our hearts and meditate on it in day and night. We can't fake it till we make it, and you can't give what you don't have. The Psalmist's testimony must be our testimony: *"I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."* Psalm 119:11

Conclusion

Remember our works and words—the fruit of our life and lips will be shaped by what we treasure, by what we are storing up in our hearts, by what we worship.

Let us prioritize abiding in Jesus and letting His word abide in us so that the God of the word is who we treasure—so that His word fills our lives and saturate our prayers.

As we find our ultimate treasure and security in the love of Jesus, His love will spill over in our lives—in all that we do and say to the glory of His name.

Discussion Guide

Read Luke 6:43-44.

- How does one determine what their true character really is?
- What is producing or shaping our true character (fruit)?
- What is the greatest measure of a Spirit-filled life?
- Is there any truth to this statement? “The reason some women can’t find a man who wears the armor of Christ is because she keeps falling for the fool in aluminum foil.”

Read Luke 6:45.

- How do your words determine the condition of your heart, who you really are?
- Why does Jesus point to our words as primary empirical evidence for who we truly are on the inside? (James 3:5b-6)
- How does what we store in our hearts impact the fruit that we bear?
- What should you look to first if you’re having a hard time controlling your tongue?
- What do you need to do to be more like Christ?