

This morning is the concluding message in our “Opening to The Holy Spirit” series. They’ve been so helpful, right? Our hope has been to broaden and deepen our understanding and awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And, as that understanding and awareness grows, so can our desire to cooperate with the Spirit’s work—moment by moment, day by day.

Today, I want to talk about how spiritual fruit happens in the lives of Christians. Now that we have new life through faith in Jesus Christ, and since the Holy Spirit has moved in and taken up residence within us, we have the opportunity to live as fully and freely as God wants us to. Since we’re new creations, the old has gone and the new has come. We don’t have to be enslaved to our old ways of thinking and living but, through the power of the Holy Spirit in us, we can live lives that look like, and point to, Jesus. That’s the objective: to glorify God and point people to Christ.

### *The Orchard*

We’re going to be digging into Galatians 5:16-26 this morning, so as you get there in your bibles, I want to share an illustration with you that I’ll refer back to throughout our time today. I’ve shared this with you before, but I think it paints such a powerful picture that I want to share it with you again.

If you’ve ever had the privilege of walking through an orchard, any kind of orchard, apples, pears, peaches, plums, almonds, any kind, you get to experience something pretty amazing. Not only are you walking through rows and rows of well-groomed trees and soil, but you’re most often in the middle of a vast space where it’s quiet, even serene.

If you'll pause during your stroll through the apple orchard and listen closely, beneath the din of distant tractors, below the sounds of the birds and crickets, if you really lean in, you can hear the trees in the orchard grunting as they try to produce fruit, "Come on, apples! You can do it! Here we go, apples!" Right? No!

Apple trees produce apples because they're apple trees. It's what they do. If they're rooted in the soil, getting water and nutrients, they can't help but produce fruit. There's no grunting. There's no straining. There's no hyping themselves up to try to make it happen. Peach trees produce peaches because that's what they do—it's not an extra or an add-on to the life of the peach tree. Fruitfulness isn't limited to a handful of *special* trees in the orchard; it's the natural overflow of every healthy tree. They just can't help but be fruitful. And the farmers know that trees that don't produce fruit have something going on: Either they're immature and unable to be fruitful yet, or there's something wrong with the tree—it's not rooted properly, not getting water and nutrients, or it's diseased.

## **New Creation**

Now, set that aside for a moment and let's talk about you, as a Christian. The Bible tells us that everyone who trusts Jesus Christ as their Leader & Forgiver, their Lord and Savior, is a new creation. Here's what it says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."—2 Corinthians 5:17 So, in Christ, you're made new. And, as we've said throughout the series, when you place your faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit moves in and takes up residence within you, making you spiritually alive. And He begins to transform you into the person God designed you to be for His glory. The Holy Spirit is there to help you live the new life you've been given so that God will be honored and so you can be a witness to the world about the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In Jesus, you have been set free. “The life of faith in Jesus Christ and life in the Spirit is characterized by freedom...”<sup>1</sup> You’re free to choose *not* to sin. You’re free to choose righteousness. You’re free to consider others ahead of yourself. You’re free to turn your back on your old ways of thinking and living while you cultivate new ways of thinking and living (think Romans 12:1-2). You now have the Spirit of Christ within you to guide, empower and encourage you in your new life. In fact, the first verse of Galatians 5 says, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” When you surrendered to the leadership of Jesus, the plan was to free you from everything that keeps you from becoming the person that God built you to be and free you live the Spirit-led life God intends for you. He wants you to be free!

Not free to do whatever you want. Not free to indulge every whim and craving. Free to become the man or woman God wants you to be.

### **Life in the Spirit Against the Flesh (v16-18)**

But there’s a problem...take a look at verses 16-18 in Galatians 5.

*“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”*

In other words, there’s a battle going on between the new, Spirit-led and empowered you, and your flesh; the old you, the default, *ungodly* you that runs on autopilot. Flesh “refer[s] to the fallen human nature that is incapable of conforming to God’s holy expectations (Romans 7:5, 18; 8:3-9; Galatians 3:3). In this sense, ‘flesh’ is unaided human effort—mere human strength without the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> McKnight, Scot. *The NIV Application Commentary: Galatians* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1995), 263.

<sup>2</sup> Youngblood, K. J. (2003). “Flesh.” In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 583). Holman Bible Publishers.

In context, Paul is writing to the Galatians because there are some creeps who are trying to get these Christians to kick their spirituality up a notch by getting circumcised and following the law of Moses. Their mistaken belief was by following Old Testament Law, that they could battle their flesh. Paul says, 'No! That's not how it's done. The flesh can only be overcome by the Spirit.' Paul explains that, within believers, the flesh and the Spirit are in conflict with each other. The only way to win that battle is to turn away from sinful desire and cooperate with the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Our flesh is the part of us that is unwilling to surrender, or yield, to God. It's our pride in our achievements and possessions. It's our lack of trust in God. It's the cherishing of secret sins. It's our refusal to forgive. It's our craving of physical pleasure and everything we see. Our flesh is that part of us, *even though we're new in Christ*, that still wants to push its way to the front and call the shots. And our flesh is in conflict with the Spirit that lives within us. The only way we will overcome the flesh is through surrender to and cooperation with the Holy Spirit. The flesh cannot be overcome or battled against, by our own striving or straining. No amount of rule-following or self-discipline will get the job done. Think about those trees in the orchard: they're not fruitful because they try so hard. They're fruitful because they're connected, deeply rooted and able to receive all they need through that connection, which results in amazing fruitfulness.

This is hard for us because we, particularly as Americans, want to know what we need to *do* to accomplish. We love the work hard, pull yourself up from nothing, busted-my-buns-to-make-it-happen stories. But you will never live freely in Christ that way—it can't be done. Your job is to cooperate with the leading of the Holy Spirit. Your job is to say 'Yes!' moment by moment. Your effort, as we'll talk more about in a minute, is to learn to discern the Lord's voice, stay in step with Him and resist the temptation to jump in front and say, 'I got this!'

---

<sup>3</sup> See Romans 8:13; Galatians 2:19–21; Colossians 3:5

## **The Fleshly Life (v 19-21)**

Now, take look at verses 19-21. Just in case anyone is unfamiliar with what the flesh looks like, Paul gives a few samples to his Galatian friends.

*"Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."*

Paul is describing people who are living like those in the pagan world around them. If you're not careful, you'll be tempted to look at this list and think, 'I've never participated in sorcery, so I'm okay.' But that's not the point. This isn't an exhaustive list, but a representative one. These are what results when people push their way to the front and, in their own strength, in their flesh, seek to lead their lives without God. Paul addresses the ungodly ways that people approach sex. He underscores the ways people seek to be 'spiritual' which are completely opposite of what God desires. He lists what happens when people turn from God and turn against one another. And he highlights how people take a good gift from God (like wine) and twist it all up because they're led by their flesh instead of the Spirit. The fleshly works Paul describes won't lead to freedom but to broken fellowship with God and others.

People who live like this, people whose lifestyle flesh-driven, will not be part of God's Kingdom. Paul is saying, if fleshly works describe your life, you don't belong to God. You can't *pretend* to belong to God because your lifestyle will give you away. That's why Jesus had such a hard time with the Pharisees. They were raging hypocrites. Jesus called them whitewashed tombs—all pretty on the outside but rotten on the inside. The fruit you fail to produce makes it obvious that something's wrong.

### *Back to the Orchard*

Sometimes, while walking through the orchard, you see what looks like a fruit tree, but it's not producing fruit in season like it should. It *looks* like

an apple tree. It's planted *among* apple trees. But it's not fruitful. Something's wrong: Either the root system has gone bad (could be the soil), or it's not getting water or it's diseased. It doesn't matter that the tree is in the orchard or that it *looks* like an apple tree, the lack of fruit tells you that the tree's unhealthy. But a healthy tree produces good fruit. And if you're connected to Jesus, your life will give it away by the fruit the Spirit produces in you. Paul describes what a healthy, fruitful, Spirit-led life looks like in verses 22-26. Take a look at it with me.

### **Life in the Spirit (v 22-26)**

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

*<sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

*<sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another."*

Notice that Paul describes 'flesh' under the umbrella of works (v 19). Your works won't help you walk with God or live for God. So, your straining, your best efforts, are useless works. But the Holy Spirit's work in you produces 'fruit.' Your connection with the Holy Spirit will produce fruit in you just as naturally as a peach tree produces peaches. The tree can't help it. It's rooted in the soil, getting all the water and nutrients it needs. When you stay connected to the Holy Spirit, when you're rooted in Christ, He will give you all you need and will produce this fruit in you!

Right out of the chute, Paul lists love. No surprise there. "It summarizes the demand of God's law (Galatians 5:14), endures forever (1 Corinthians 13:3), and unites all the virtues of life (Colossians 3:14)."<sup>4</sup> Every bit of Jesus' life and ministry was anchored in love. And, as you go through the list: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...these are all characteristics of Christ. And Jesus wants us to

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 271.

be like Him. That's why it's critical that we stay intimately connected with the Holy Spirit. We can't be like Jesus through our own efforts, by our own works. Every attempt to do so will fail because this fruit is Holy Spirit produced, not self-produced.

### *Fruit Comes with Connection*

So, let's talk about that connection and what I mean when I talk about being connected to Jesus and His Spirit. The biggest part of being connected with Jesus is having a relationship with Him through faith. You can't have a relationship with someone you don't know, and you certainly won't have a relationship with someone you don't trust. To be connected with Jesus means you've placed your faith, your trust, in Him and what He's accomplished on the cross for you. When you ask Jesus to be your Leader & Forgiver, your Lord & Savior, that's the *beginning* of your connection. To use the orchard analogy, placing your faith in Jesus Christ is like planting the fruit tree into good soil.

Next, your relationship with Jesus is deepened through investing time. Just like any other relationship you have, if you don't spend time, the relationship dies. Spend time each day with Jesus. Remember, the Spirit of Christ lives within you. So, it's not like you need to do some sort of ritual for spending time with Him—but there's nothing wrong with a routine. Carve out time for Bible reading and study. If you want to know what's important to God, what makes Him smile and what brings His wrath, read and study your Bible. Be a student of the love letter that God has made available to you. Scripture memorization is a huge way to discern the leading of the Spirit because the Holy Spirit can take the scripture you've hidden in your heart and bring it to mind at just the right moment. What you've memorized gives the Spirit a common language to communicate with you.

Prayer is crucial. It doesn't need to be fluffy or in King James English. Just talk to the Lord. Invite Him to commune with you. Tell Him you need Him to guide and lead you again today. Ask Him to fill you—like the sails on a ship—and to lead you wherever and however He desires. And, if you're

like me and you don't usually speak telepathically with others, feel free to speak out loud as you pray. Yes, the Lord can hear your unspoken thoughts, but I like to speak out loud because that's what I do with my friends. I'll talk to Him while I'm driving or while I'm walking and I'll pull up a chair and imagine Jesus sitting across from me as I pray. *Don't forget* that prayer is also about listening. I don't know if you've ever had (or been!) that friend who just speaks constantly and never listens for input or clarifying questions. And when they're done, they're like 'okay, bye!' and they're off. Communication is about speaking *and* listening. So, I'd encourage you to Listen at least as much as you speak.

Worship is a key element unique to relationship building with the Lord. Worship is our response to the Father's love. So, we may worship in song, adoration, praise, thanksgiving, in silence, alone or in community. He alone is worthy of our worship. So, make it part of your daily and weekly rhythm.

This is just a short list of possible ways to deepen your connection with Christ. There are many other ways and there are whole books dedicated this subject. But my point is: when you've been planted in the good soil of relationship with Jesus, you need the consistent nourishment and refreshment of being with Him. And, as you spend time, and as your relational roots deepen, you'll discover that *all* your time is spent with Him—not just a few quiet moments in the day. You'll realize that you're abiding in Christ; constantly connected to Him. Talking to Him throughout the day. And the things that are important to Him will become increasingly important to you. The things He loves you're learning to love and the things He hates you're learning to hate. The old you, the flesh which loves to jump in front and take the lead, loses ground as the fruit of the Spirit begins to grow in you. The more connected you are with the Lord, the freer you become.

Listen to how Jesus described it in John 15. "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.



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 15:4-5

Your fruitfulness depends on being and staying connected with the Lord. You don't make the fruit grow; the He does. Your 'effort,' if that's the word you want to use, goes to staying yielded to the Spirit's leadership each day. The hard work for you and me is *cooperating* with the Spirit and saying 'yes' each time you have the chance. Which leads me to this: If you're going to remain deeply rooted in the Lord, you must respond obediently to Him. We don't like the word obey. It makes some people feel 'less-than.' Others respond with, 'I'm not an animal that needs to obey.' That response reveals what's going on inside. If you have a problem with obedience, press into that. Talk with the Lord about it. Ask Him to help you to be willing to be obedient and when the chance to cooperate in obedience comes, take it. You won't regret it. Your Savior will *never* lead you astray or give you bad instruction. He knows precisely where He wants you and the best way to get you there. *Trust Him*. You've trusted Him for your salvation. Trust Him for your day-to-day living.

So, stay connected and be obedient. Sounds simple enough. But if you've walked with Jesus more than a few days you know that *the battle is real*. You're a new creation but the old you, your flesh, really wants to get in there and mess it up.

### **How Fruity are You?**

So, since you're all thinking it, I might as well ask the question, 'How fruity are you?' Are you fruitful? Ask your best friends, your spouse and, if you're brave, your more grown children. If you're fruitful, it'll be unmistakably evident. When you're deeply connected with Jesus, being nourished and refreshed by His Spirit and living in obedience, fruit is unstoppable. Just like those apple trees in the orchard.

And just like those apple trees, when you look at the fruitful tree you'll see fruit of differing sizes. Some are huge and ripe for the picking, others are smaller and in very much in process. Still others are tiny and just getting started. But, if the tree remains rooted, nourished and watered, that fruit will ripen beautifully.

You may be in a place where love and joy are ripe and beautiful, but patience and gentleness are little, bitty fruit on the branches. The others are clearly in process and well on their way. That's okay. The Spirit is working in you, and some things take a little longer to mature than others. There may be broken spaces and places in you that make patience and gentleness take a little longer to grow. That's okay. Just as long as you're cooperating with the Spirit through the process. He doesn't just want you to bear some of the fruit, He wants you to bear all of it. The Spirit wants you to be fruitful in every way, bearing all the fruit. And, unlike the Spiritual *gifts* where the Lord gives you a gift and you a gift and you a gift, and none of us get all the gifts—the fruit is for everyone. All of it. For every one of us. Each and every Christian is uniquely gifted and to be fruitful in every way.

If you're a Christian and you're not fruitful at all, something is wrong. It's either the roots, water & nutrients, or disease. You may need to look at where your roots are. Are you really rooted in Jesus or are you planted in the world? You'll never bear spiritual fruit if you're planted in the world and living in the flesh. It *cannot* be done. Maybe it's not the roots, it's the water & nutrients. If you're not nurturing time with Jesus, it's no wonder you're not fruitful: you're starving. So, start there. Watch how quickly the fruit grows when you're spending daily time with Jesus. You can't help it when you're getting all you need. Or maybe you're disobedient. You know what He wants you to do, and you just won't or don't do it. Disobedience compromises your overall spiritual health, and your intimacy with the Lord, like a virus. You've got to get rid of that if you're going to be fruitful.

Some of you may have been coming to church, making friends with Christians, but all you see in your life are the works of the flesh and no spiritual fruit. If we were talking face-to-face, I'd ask you if you'd planted yourself deeply in Jesus—become connected with Him personally by trusting Him as your Leader and Forgiver. That's where I'd encourage you to start. Once you're planted, then you set yourself up for a healthy root system by spending time with Him each day like I mentioned a few minutes ago.

Remember: this is a battle. In Christ, you're a new creation. The Holy Spirit lives in you and will give you *all you need* for a fruitful life in Christ. The kind of life that looks like Jesus, points others to Him and glorifies Him. But there's the flesh, the old you, that wants to try to steer the ship. Paul says, the person who bears the fruit of the Spirit, is the person who is truly free because they have crucified their old way of living through this new way of living by the Spirit. The person who lives fruitfully is truly free. There are no works, there is no law, there are no moral efforts that can provide this kind of freedom. It's only available to those who are, and remain, intimately connected to Christ and surrendered to the leadership of His Spirit.

## **Reflection**

I want to give you a minute draw near to the Lord. I want you to invite the Holy Spirit to speak clearly to you. If you need to get connected with Him, start there. Ask Him if you're holding anything back from Him. Ask Him if you've been disobedient. Ask Him to show you what He wants to do in you so that you can be even more fruitful. This is your time.

## **Close**

Fruitfulness is rooted in connection. You don't have to strain or hype yourself up. You just need to stay connected to Jesus and cooperate with His Spirit.