

WHY THE HOLY SPIRIT'S FRUIT MATTERS**GALATIANS 5:22-25**

Sometimes tremendously gifted Christians can act like real jerks. For example, very few Jesus followers have had the God-given talents and passion of Bob Pierce. He was a Christian leader who founded and established World Vision – one of the largest and finest Christian relief organizations anywhere in the world today. He also started Samaritan's Purse – another very effective Christian relief organization now led by Franklin Graham, Billy Graham's son. Bob Pierce was a dynamic preacher who God used to bring many people to faith in Jesus all over the world. He was also a charismatic, visionary leader who both attempted and accomplished great things for God. He was a pioneer in helping evangelical, Bible-believing Christians understand the incredible physical and spiritual needs of fellow believers who lived in undeveloped or underdeveloped countries around the world. He was truly a global Christian.

But Bob Pierce was not an easy man to live with! Some years ago, his daughter wrote a sympathetic, but very candid account of what it was like to grow up with her father. Marilee loved her father greatly and her book is anything but condemning. But she wrote frankly about how her father woefully neglected his own family while trying to take care of the world. She told how Pierce finally separated from her mother and remained estranged from her until the very end of his life. She shared how Pierce's pride and unwillingness to be accountable to anyone else ultimately cost him his leadership role with World Vision. The board of World Vision had little choice but to fire him.

Greatness of talent never guarantees greatness of character. It's possible to be greatly gifted by God and yet lack the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our personal lives. If that happens, it's most definitely not God's will for your life or mine. As we conclude our study of the Holy Spirit today, I want you to think with me about why the Holy Spirit's fruit matters. What are the fruit of the Spirit? They're clearly identified in the Bible. One of our family's traditional activities every fall season is apple picking. At harvest time, it can seem like some of those trees have more apples on them than leaves! This morning, as we think together about the fruit of the Holy Spirit, I want you to imagine a large, beautiful fruit tree laden down with all sorts of different fruit – each one as delicious and beautiful as the other.

LET'S SURVEY THE WHOLE SPIRITUAL FRUIT TREE.

We've already discussed the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Here's how they're different than His fruit. The moment you are born again spiritually by the Holy Spirit, you're given spiritual abilities the Bible calls gifts. Their purpose is to glorify God as well as to build up and bless His people. But the fruit of the Spirit only show up in your life and mine as a result of being filled with the Spirit, not just being born again by Him. Just because you got converted, saved, or born again doesn't mean you will automatically produce the fruit of the Spirit. No, the fruit of the Spirit show up when we are being actively controlled by Him. And to be controlled by the Spirit is to be filled with Him.

Gifts are all about what a follower of Jesus does, but fruit are all about who a follower of Jesus is. In other words, gifts are about your service; fruit are about your character. There are many spiritual gifts. None of us have exactly the same mix of these Spirit-given abilities. When it comes to His giftings, the Holy Spirit loves diversity and variety. But when it comes to the Spirit's fruit, we need to recognize we're supposed to produce all of it. Every character quality mentioned there in Galatians ought to show up in your life and mine. You might notice a Christian showing great patience in his or her life and say to yourself, "Wow, that's great, but I just don't have the gift of patience." News flash! Patience isn't a gift. Neither is love, kindness, or self-control. Every single one of those nine character qualities we read in Galatians 5 should show up in your life and mine.

Why does the Holy Spirit indwell you and me? To mold and shape our inner character to resemble Jesus as much as possible. So let's be very clear. The presence of the Holy Spirit's fruit is better evidence God lives in us than the gifts of the Spirit. If you want to admire certain Jesus followers, admire the ones who display these character qualities – not the ones who preach well, sing well, or lead well. We have a celebrity culture in the Christian world just as much as in the secular world. We tend to make stars and celebrities out of gifted, talented Christians. But the person who has allowed the Holy Spirit to develop love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in his or her life – that's who deserves your admiration.

So, how do you get the fruit of the Holy Spirit to show up in your life? Right there's an important and interesting irony. On the one hand, you can't produce these character traits – the fruit – by sheer self-effort or trying real hard. Because they're the direct result of the Holy Spirit living in you and being in control of you, you can't work this stuff up all by yourself. On the other hand, they don't just show up in your life without your active involvement. The fruit of the Holy Spirit appear in your life as a direct result of willing, conscious, and continual surrender of your life to the Holy Spirit. It's all about you and the Holy Spirit working at it together. There's nothing automatic about spiritual fruit bearing! They're the result of meditating on Scripture and then practicing what you read. They're the result of consistent, genuine prayer to God. They're the result of facing tough, painful issues in life and saying, "Lord, I surrender this situation to you. Please work Your character into me." They're the result of dealing with difficult people and saying, "Lord, I surrender this person and my relationship with him or her to You. Please work your character into me." They're the result of facing the need for some kind of change in our behavior or adjustment in our attitudes and saying, "Lord, I need You to help me change this about my life. Please work your character into me."

The power and presence of the Holy Spirit plus my willing surrender to Him equals the fruit of the Holy Spirit. If He doesn't live in you, no amount of personal sincerity or willingness matters. But He's not going to force His power on you. So, if you're not willing to do the hard work of personal surrender – and sometimes that's very hard work indeed – you'll never experience His power. Those two must come together – God's power and your willing surrender - for the fruit of the Holy Spirit to bud, blossom, grow, and become mature in your life. I believe that's what Paul meant here when he said,

“Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives.” (Gal. 5:25 NLT)

So, then, let’s take a step back and take a look at this whole spiritual fruit tree. Developing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control is a lifelong process. Here’s an uncomfortable truth. God often uses negative factors to create Jesus’ character in you and me. In other words, He often uses difficult people, painful situations, and unpleasant circumstances. How does God develop patience in you? Often, He just allows frustrating situations and people that rub you the wrong way to show up in your life. How does God develop love in you? He will, often, bring people into your life who are impossible to love in your own strength. How about goodness? Quite often, He confronts you with situations that test your integrity. Are all God’s methods negative? Certainly not! He uses positive factors like Scripture, prayer, worship, and great relationships with other followers of Jesus, too. The great Baptist pastor and preacher, Charles Spurgeon, made an interesting observation: “Omnipotence has its servants everywhere.” Meaning what? Omnipotence means to be all powerful. God’s power is so unlimited and boundless that He can literally use anything and everything in your life – both positive and negative – to make you like Jesus a little bit more. When it comes to the Holy Spirit and His work in your life, nothing ever gets wasted. All of it can help produce these beautiful qualities.

Now, it’s easy to look at your own life and get discouraged by the lack of spiritual fruit you might observe. Two thoughts. First, you aren’t always the best judge of how the Holy Spirit’s fruit gets manifested in your life. I think sometimes God hides His fruit in our lives from us. Sometimes other people can see these Spirit-given qualities in us better than we can see them ourselves. That’s a good thing, because we have a tendency to take credit for things we shouldn’t. This is the fruit of the Holy Spirit after all – it’s not my fruit or your fruit. Just make your focus consciously and continuously surrendering control of your life every day to the Holy Spirit and let Him worry about what fruit shows up in your life. Second, remember that Holy Spirit fruit development is a lifelong process. God is all about finishing what He’s started in our lives whether we like it or not. So, again, just make sure your heart is as open and surrendered to Him as possible any given hour of any given day and then get out of His way. He’ll do the rest!

LET’S SAVOR EACH SPIRITUAL FRUIT.

We’ve looked over – surveyed – the whole tree; now let’s briefly taste or savor each of these nine character qualities. In one sense all of them are singular – they all come from the Holy Spirit. But in another sense, they’re plural in that these qualities have different looks, shapes, or flavors, so to speak – just like literal fruit.

The first three fruit primarily point to our relationship with God. Love is the greatest of all the fruit of the Spirit. The other eight qualities are really just one aspect of love. In other words, love is joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled. The Bible makes it clear that when God’s love is flowing through you and

me, it's actually more than a feeling or emotion. Ultimately, it's the decision to relate to God in a certain way that then has profound impact on how we treat human beings – God's greatest creation. Jesus is the One who put those together when He said, "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Mt. 22:37-39 NLT) By the way, love ought to be the outstanding mark of this or any church. Sherwood Wirt, a Christian author, wrote, "I have learned there is no point in talking about strong churches or weak churches, big churches or little churches, warm churches and cold churches. Such categories are unrealistic and beside the point. There are only loving churches and unloving churches."

Joy. Our Declaration of Independence says you and I have a fundamental right to pursue happiness. God never said that. The Bible says we must each seek God first and foremost and when we find Him, joy will be a wonderful result. Be careful when it comes to understanding joy! It's not the result of everything going well for you all the time be it your marriage, your kids, your job, your finances, or your health. Joy is instead the result of conscious, real relationship with the living God that fills you with gratitude for His constant presence and goodness.

Peace. This world offers all kinds of fake peace. There's the false "peace" offered in alcohol and drugs. There's the false "peace" supposedly found in money and things. There's the false "peace" of somehow getting to a place where everything is OK in our lives. Good luck ever getting there! Then there's the peace of God – a deep tranquility of heart and mind God can give us even in the midst of the very worst life can throw at us. Despite it all, you know you matter to God. You know your future is secure in Him. You know that He loves you and is for you. You know you still possess something of ultimate importance that can never be taken away regardless of what happens.

The next three fruit described deal primarily with our relationships with other people. The word for patience here was also used to describe the Roman army. It's the ability to persist, to endure, and to conquer ultimately. It can refer to the ability to deal positively with difficult people as well as difficult circumstances – but mostly difficult people. Who is God using in your life today to teach you patience? I'm sure that person's face just came to mind! This is the Spirit-given ability to bear with, endure, and even show grace and kindness to a difficult person. There's an old Hebrew legend about Abraham. Sitting outside his tent one evening, he saw a tired old man coming toward him. Abraham rushed out, greeted him, and invited him into his tent to rest. There he washed the old man's feet and gave him food and drink. The old man immediately began eating without offering a prayer of thanks. Abraham asked him, "Don't you worship God?" The old traveler said, "I worship only fire and reverence no other god." When he heard this, Abraham got very angry, grabbed the old man by the shoulders and threw him out into the cold night air. After the old man stumbled away, God came to Abraham asking him what happened to the man. Abraham replied, "I threw him out because he didn't worship You." God answered, "I've suffered and put up

with him for 80 years although He dishonors Me. Could you not endure him one night?"
The spiritual fruit of patience.

Goodness and kindness are closely related. Goodness means integrity here. It means living life God's way, being a person of your word, and relating to others honestly and truthfully. Kindness is an attitude and action that makes you approachable to other people. The word for kindness was also used to describe fully mature wine – mellow, sweet. When the Holy Spirit gets a hold of your life, a kind of mellowness and sweetness emerges in your life. This is the person who always finds a way to show compassion even when it's not deserved. There's the story of a well-known Christian who'd been found drunk and non-functional on the sidewalk. It was an embarrassing situation that threatened to ruin this man's reputation and rightly so. After hearing about it, another Christian man – who happened to be quite wealthy - immediately sent his chauffeured limousine to pick up this man while his wife prepared the best room in their beautiful home for the man's arrival. A child in that home watched in wide-eyed amazement as his mother turned down the covers on the bed. "But, Mom," he protested, "he's drunk. He might even get sick there in the bed." But his mother said, "Yes, I know. But this man has slipped and fallen. When he comes to, he'll be so ashamed. He will need all the loving encouragement we can give him."

Wherever the Christian faith has gone, Jesus followers have always performed numerous acts of kindness. Some of all that has even developed into hospitals, mental health facilities, orphanages for children, and assistance for the poor. Jesus' attitude toward religious hypocrites could be very sharp, negative, and direct. Remember the Pharisees? But His attitude toward people caught in sinful lifestyles was invariably kind and compassionate. Remember the woman caught in the very act of adultery? Too many messed up people seeking God's help have been turned off by compassionless Christians. God prizes the spiritual fruit of goodness and kindness in His children.

The final three fruits point primarily to our relationship with ourselves. Faithfulness is reliability and dependability. It's the ability to follow through and show up. It's about being a person of your word even in the small things of life. Gentleness. This is power and strength under control. It shows up in a submissive, teachable spirit toward God and a considerate, courteous spirit toward other people. I like the story of a dad who went out one Saturday to find an aquarium for the four free goldfish his kids had won at the school carnival. He didn't much like the price tags of the ones he saw at first. Then he spotted a used 10 gallon display tank complete with the appropriate filter and gravel for just \$5. It was nasty and dirty, but the savings made the two hour clean up bearable. Those four free fish looked just great in their new home. At least through the first day. By Sunday, one fish was dead. Monday morning revealed a second casualty. By Monday evening, a third goldfish had gone belly up. Dad called in an expert – a member of his church who had a 30 gallon aquarium. It didn't take him long to discover the problem. The tank had been washed out with soap – an absolute no-no apparently. That father's uninformed, ignorant efforts had destroyed the very lives he was trying to protect. Sometimes we can get very zealous about cleaning up our own lives or other

people's lives. We end up using "killer soaps" – stuff like condemnation, criticism, nagging, or temper tantrums. We think we're doing the right thing, but our harshness is more than they can bear.

Self-control. The old tongue in cheek joke "I can resist anything but temptation" can be true of our lives more often than we care to admit. Godly self-control means being able to master and control our thoughts, our attitudes, and our actions. Self-control, for a Jesus follower, applies to every conceivable arena of life. For example, it means moderation in eating, staying sober in drinking alcohol, sexual abstinence until marriage and having sex only in marriage, modesty in the clothes we wear, avoiding financial debt, expressing anger appropriately, and even limiting our exposure to things like social media. God highly prizes self-control in His children. The Bible says, "A person without self-control is like a city with broken-down walls.... Better to have self-control than to conquer a city." (Pro. 25:28; 16:32 NLT) The spiritual fruit of faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Marilyn Edwards Madsen was a wonderful, godly woman. She exuded many of the spiritual fruit we've discussed today. She and her husband were missionaries in Africa. Then, while just in her early 30s, Marilyn died during the birth of her fourth child. It was a heartbreaking tragedy for many people including, of course, her parents. In fact, it was such a blow, they never fully recovered from it. Her father taught Old Testament studies at Denver Theological Seminary at the time of her death. At the time, Dr. Edwards happened to be teaching the book of Job which examines keeping faith in God in the face of life's mysterious suffering. In those days of agonizing sorrow, Dr. Edwards bore his loss with quiet dignity, strength, and submission to God. He refused to question God's wisdom or goodness, never revealing any trace of bitterness or resentment. Sometime later on, when Dr. Edwards retired, the seminary held a banquet in his honor. One of his former students - now a pastor - spoke on behalf of the alumni. He recalled the death of Marilyn Edwards Madsen. He then described how in the weeks immediately afterward, her grief-stricken father faithfully taught the book of Job at the seminary morning after morning. He discussed the testing of our faith by suffering and the need to keep on trusting God even in the face of profound loss and tragedy. One of his former students closed his comments by saying, "In those mornings, we saw the Word become flesh."

That's what the fruit of the Holy Spirit is all about. Yes, Jesus was and is the Word made flesh. But when the Holy Spirit's fruit shows up in your life and mine, people get a glimpse of Jesus in us. The Word becomes flesh in you and me. Survey the whole tree full of spiritual fruit. Stop and savor each individual fruit. But most importantly, surrender again to the Holy Spirit so that people can see the risen Lord Jesus in and through your life and desire Him to be in their lives as well.