

The Fruitful Life of the Spirit

Galatians 5:16-25

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ 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. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

- **What is Spiritual fruit?**
- **How is it produced?**
- **Why it takes a lifetime?**

What is Spiritual fruit?

1. *Botanical Imagery*

When the Bible talks about spiritual growth and fruitfulness, it almost always turns to botanical imagery.

- Here - the “Fruit” of the Spirit.
 - **1 Peter 1:23** “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”
 - **Psalm 1** – The righteous are like a tree planted by a river.
 - **John 15** – I am the vine, you are the branches.

○ Spiritual growth is a lot like botanical growth.

▪ *Organic*

- Not mechanical growth.
 - Erect a building, welding steel pieces together.
- Organic, dynamic, living.
 - Nurtured and tended.
 - Not constructed or engineered.

▪ *Gradual*

- It is subtle and largely unobservable.
 - Watching flowers grow.
 - Suddenly notice they’ve flowered.
 - Watching children grow.
 - See old pictures.
 - Wow!
- Often goes unnoticed.
 - Don’t feel it happening.
 - Over time – I’ve changed.
- Like a child – running faster
 - More patient.
 - More courage.
 - More selfless.

▪ *Seasonal*

- Botanical growth has seasons.
 - Winter – fruitless, root growth
 - Spring – rapid growth.
 - Summer – strength, maturity
 - Autumn – Fruitfulness, glory
- Rapid and slow growth phases.
 - Some obvious, external
 - Others subtle, internal

▪ ***Inevitable***

- Fruit is born on the plant and the plant grows from the “seed” of the Spirit in the Gospel.
 - If the seed germinates and comes to life and has its way, there will be fruit...
 - We will and must bear fruit.
 - Inevitable.
- A guy told me once that he was in a graveyard and saw tombstone slab cracked through by a huge tree growing right up through the middle of it.
 - A little acorn buried there.
 - All that potential... the slab couldn't stop it.
- If the Gospel has its way in us... and runs its course... we will bear fruit.
 - No alternatives.
- We are not saved by our fruitfulness.
 - We are saved by grace alone.
 - But the grace that saves is never alone.
 - It will inevitably bear fruit.

2. ***Character Formation***

- This fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control... these are attributes.
 - These are the ***characteristics of Christ***.
- ***Christlikeness***
 - To bear the fruit of the Spirit = conformed to the image of the Son.
 - The Spirit is making us like Christ.
 - ***Romans 8:16-20*** – “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.”
 - We are sons & daughters of God.
 - Titans!
- ***Family Resemblance***
 - DNA organically reproducing.
 - We increasingly live out ***who we really are*** as Sons & Daughters in Christ.
 - Spirit is reproducing in us the life of Heaven itself.

- **Interior**
 - Tree within a tree.
 - Old dead tree with a new tree growing from within it.
 - Seed dropped in.
 - As the old tree faded away, a whole new life grew from within in.
 - God has planted the seed of his own eternal life and character in us by grace.
 - At it will grow from within and become our very life as the old fades and falls away.

C.S. Lewis - ***Mere Christianity***

“For mere improvement is not redemption, though redemption always improves people even here and now and will, in the end, improve them to a degree we cannot yet imagine. God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man.”

- ***The fruit of the Spirit is the unstoppable interior life of God, planted in us, which will grow gradually, seasonally and inevitably until we become like Christ himself.***

How is it produced?

1. ***Activated by the Spirit.***

- Notice: the “works” of the flesh in v.19
 - Vs. the “fruit” of the Spirit in v.22?
- Sin is something we do. We act.
 - “Fruit” is something we bear.
 - The Spirit acts.
 - It’s His work.
- The Spirit must activate this process of fruitfulness or it will not happen.
 - We are led by Him (18), enlivened by Him (25), and we keep in step with Him (25).
 - But He’s in the drivers seat.
- This is what Jesus means when it says “Abide in me, that you might bear much fruit.”
 - Apart from me you can do nothing.
 - We need the Spirit of Christ if we are to bear fruit.
 - We can’t do this on our own.

2. ***Executed by us.***

- This Christlike character... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...
 - Is ***activated*** by the Spirit... and it is ***executed*** by us.
 - We live in love... and it’s ***our*** love truly... but it’s ***from*** the Spirit.
 - He’s changed us so that we love with the very love of Christ himself.

- **Galatians 2:20** “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
- So only the Spirit can unleash this life within us... and yet we are the ones who bear this fruit in our lives.
 - When I live in the flesh... I live from myself.
 - Old self.
 - When I live in the Spirit... I live from the life of Christ planted in me.
 - New self.

3. **Mutual Interdependence**

- Fruit is singular; verb is singular; predicate is plural.
 - These 9 expressions are actually one fruit.
 - Representative list, not exhaustive.
 - They grow **together**.
 - Mutually interdependent.
- That’s one of the ways you can tell if it’s **true fruit** of the **Spirit** or if it’s just **self-effort**.
- **Self-control** and **Joy**
 - Can gain self-control through self-effort.
 - Gut it out... make ourselves stop.
 - Rarely joyous.
 - But when the Spirit is at work, I’m growing in self-discipline and finding great joy at the same time.
 - Because I’m living in the delight of the Lord as I learn to say no to ungodliness.

- **Gentleness** and **Faithfulness**
 - Some people are gentle by nature.
 - More tender and non-confrontive.
 - Faithfulness on the other hand takes courage and tenacity... toughness.
 - Stand up for what’s right.
 - Protect those we love.
 - By disposition, we might be
 - Gentle and compliant
 - Or courageously faithful
 - But when these things come together – Tenderness and Toughness - it’s a sign that the Spirit is at work in us.

4. **Relationally Revealed**

- Think about it: How many of these fruit can be done in solitude?
 - Love – no
 - Joy – maybe, but who would you express it to?
 - Peace – harmony with others
 - Patience – Assumes someone obnoxious
 - Kindness – no
 - Goodness – pursuing the good of others
 - Faithfulness – in relationships
 - Gentleness – in our demeanor toward others
 - Self-control – especially in relationships
- This fruit is revealed in relationships.
 - In community.
 - Implication: our **relationships** are the **primary indicators** of our Spiritual health.
 - Unless we are enmeshed in the vulnerability of interdependent relationships within the body of Christ, the Spirit’s fruit will be stifled in our lives.

Why it takes a lifetime?

1. We're discovering how to follow.

- Instead of forging ahead on our own.
 - We must learn to follow Christ and be led by his Spirit.
- V.16 – “walk by the Spirit”
- V.18 – “led by the Spirit”
- V.25 – “live by the Spirit”
 - “keep in step with the Spirit”
 - Yielding. Deferring. Submission. Surrender. Humility.
- Learn to distrust our instincts.
 - To be suspicious of our reactions.
 - Invite the Spirit to teach, rebuke, correct, train.
 - Yield to his voice.
 - Comply with his wishes.
 - Do the Christlike thing when your old instinct is to go the other way.
- Keep in step... at pace with... in companionship with... the Spirit.
 - Not lagging behind.
 - Not running ahead.
 - Listening and acting on what he's working on right now.
- A whole new way of living under the **Lordship** of Christ under the **leadership** of the Spirit.

2. We're embracing cruciform living.

- V.24 – “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”
 - **Galatians 2:20** “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
 - **Romans 8:13** If we live by the Spirit we will “put to death the misdeeds of the body”
 - **Colossians 3:5** “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature”
- Following Jesus means both dying and rising with Him.
 - We die to our sin.
 - We die to our selves.
 - We die to having our own way.
 - We die to our old affections.
 - Our old selves must die for our new life in Christ to come to life.
- And we rise.
 - We are a new creation in Christ.
 - We are born again into a new and living hope.
 - We are alive in the Spirit.
 - And we learn to walk in newness of life.
- There is so much in me that needs to die in order that the life of Christ might be formed in me.
 - It takes a long time to die.
 - Paul says “I die daily.”

3. *We're learning new desires and affections.*

- The root of our sin lies in our desires.
 - Fleshly “passions and desires” (24)
 - “The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit” (17)
- The battle lies in our desires.
 - Our affections. Our heart-longings.
 - That’s where the real work is done.
 - The Spirit instills new longings... new desires... new affections.
 - The flesh had had control longer... and we’re habituated to them...
 - What will we do?
- I imagine my spiritual life like a tree.
 - What I desire I put my roots in.
 - And those roots nourish my inner life.
 - And then my life bears fruit in keeping with my inner life.
- The Spirit gives me new desires.
 - Which grow new roots.
 - Which then nourishes my inner life... bringing new life and health.
 - Which then bears new fruit in keeping with the new inner life in me.
- Everything comes down to our desires.
 - And what does the Spirit desire above all else?
 - Christ.

- And as we grow in our affections for Christ, we find ourselves becoming who we were always meant to be.
 - Conformed to the image and glory of Christ.
 - And yet fully ourselves... in fact more fully ourselves that we have ever been.

C.S. Lewis - Mere Christianity

“Your real, new self (which is Christ’s and also yours, and yours just because it is His)...It will come when you are looking for Him. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes, every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fibre of your being and you will find eternal life.

Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in that long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else...”

PRAY