

The Fruit of the Spirit

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[0 : 00] This is a sermon from King's Church West, William. You do more than we could imagine. Thank you, Lord. Amen. Amen. So we're going to explore these verses together from Galatians. And yeah, this passage is a funny phrase, isn't it? The fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit. Have we got any keen gardeners in the room today? No hands. Oh, that's good. Come on. Nathan's very good. Luke Daines, if he was here, he'd have his hands straight up. Becky, very good. Weeding. Well, I'm impressed. Most people hate weeding, so that's very good. Well, Char and I, we're not necessarily keen gardeners. We're willing. I wouldn't say we're very experienced and knowledgeable, but we are willing. But we've been very lucky in our garden, because before we moved in, about two or three years ago, the lady who lived there before us planted loads of cool stuff.

[1 : 22] So last summer, we had this bumper crop of strawberries and gooseberries, and we had so much fruit that we couldn't pick it. You know, some of it just rotted away.

We couldn't eat enough of it. We couldn't freeze it. So a bit like the Danish boys this morning, they did their little sale of baking. We did a bit of a fruit sale. And last summer, our kids went out on the street, and they were selling all the strawberries and stuff. And Evie, I have to say Evie, absolutely loved it. She was like a, you know, like the Cockney Market store. She was like, strawberries, strawberries, come get me strawberries. She absolutely loved it. And I think our neighbors saw a different side of her after that, which is great. But now, we're coming around to summer. We've had quite a long winter, haven't we? And I have to say, our garden has not been as fruitful over the winter months. We had a brilliant glut in July, and that was it. And the winters can feel very long. In our scripture today, we've been thinking about fruit.

[2 : 21] But it's a different kind of fruit, isn't it? It's a fruit, if we go take the metaphor a bit further, it's a fruit that's not restricted to seasons, thank God. It's not like it all happens in July, and that's it.

It's a fruit that is not just limited to one type of fruit. You know, we got loads of strawberries. But here, we're reading about all these different kinds of fruit that occur. Fruit from God. And it's a fruit that, last metaphor, it tastes better than any kind of fruit you could grow. Any kind of fruit you could buy, even in the best supermarket. The fruit that God offers in our lives is so much better, isn't it? It's the fruit of the Holy Spirit. So we're going to be thinking about that today. And we're going to be exploring what is the fruit of the Spirit, and how does it grow? Now, as we've heard, the Apostle Paul, who wrote the book of Galatians to the Galatian church, he lists here nine attributes or qualities that he describes as the fruit of the Spirit.

I bet lots of you will know them off by heart. You know, you might have learned it at Sunday school. We've got love, joy, peace, forbearance, or patience you might have in your Bible, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

[3 : 29] And these are the virtues or qualities. Becky was counting, checking that. I've not missed one out. Just in case, dude, thank you. These are the qualities that the Holy Spirit wants to grow in each of our lives, so that we can live.

I think there's lots of different reasons why, just really quickly. You know, I think it's about our identity, isn't it? Partly our Father God. He displays all of these attributes so wonderfully. And as his children, we get to be shining like him, reflecting him a bit. And it's so we can bless people around us. You know, if we're people of the fruit of the Spirit, we are going to be a blessing wherever we go. And it honors him, doesn't it?

Every part of our lives for him, honoring him. And it is a life-changing work. So it's not just like a nice little, maybe like a song or a rhyme or something in Sunday school.

It's not just that. It's a life-changing work that the Holy Spirit is doing in every Christian. And to be honest, it's a life-changing work that our world needs.

[4 : 31] Our world is crying out for those attributes, those qualities, those things that we've read on the screen there. I was, last night, I was just Googling. I was kind of interested to find out what are the most popular books out there at the moment.

You know you get these, like, top ten bestsellers on the New York Times and stuff like that. And so I was looking at the top ten non-fiction books that are out there right now.

And here's what I found. Here are a few of the top ten. Number two, if you've read any of these books, by the way, you can let me know if they're any good. Number two is called Careless People. And it's a book that is describing the perils of leadership that is driven by power and greed.

Ooh, how good is that, eh? Number four gets better. It's called The Anxious Generation. It's a book about the epidemic of worry and mental illness.

Interesting. Number six is called The Body Keeps the Score. And it's a study of trauma and how trauma affects our bodies and our minds. And the last one, I think Mike could like this one.

[5 : 36] Number eight is called On Tyranny. All about tyranny. I just think you like history, Mike, you know. It doesn't sound very cheerful, does it? Describe it like that.

No, no, it was no slur on your character or anything like that. But it's interesting, isn't it? The topics of the books that our people are interested in, the topics of the books that are about what's happening in our world.

Power, greed, anxiety, brokenness. All these different sort of the attributes of the culture we live in, aren't they? How our world needs to know the perfect love of God.

You know, the perfect love of God that's expressed in Jesus' sacrifice upon the cross. Dying for the mess that we've made personally. The mess I've made. The mess that you've made.

The mess that our world is in. And also today, how the world needs the work of the Holy Spirit. You know, the fruit of the Spirit that can transform lives.

[6 : 37] It can transform my life. It can transform your life. It can transform our world. Now, it's clear that the fruit of the Spirit, just in thinking about the name, the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

It comes about through, not me, not you, but God at work in our lives. The fruit of the Holy Spirit. Paul contrasts this with the desires and acts of the flesh.

So we've got the flesh and the spirit. The works of the flesh are things like jealousy or selfish ambition. And it flows out of our fallen, sinful nature. So, you know, apart from transforming work of the Holy Spirit, we naturally, we instinctively gravitate towards the things of the flesh.

So we naturally become jealous. Or we naturally become angry and rageful. But God is about a work in our lives to transform us.

So it's clear it comes from him that he's doing something in our lives. But from the verses we've read today, it's not totally clear how the fruit of the Spirit grows.

[7 : 46] How does it actually work? How does it happen? Well, we've got this word fruit and we're going to explore that a little bit. Because I think the word fruit is really important. Paul obviously used the word fruit for a reason.

He could have used other words. He used the word fruit. So we're going to look at that. And I'm going to look at just two things in particular. I'm sure there are lots and lots more we could say. So number one.

I think the word fruit is important. Because healthy fruit comes from having healthy roots. Healthy fruit comes from having healthy roots. So in nature, all of us will know, even if you're not a gardener, you will know that a fruit cannot grow on a plant unless the plant is healthy.

Unless the plant is healthy. It has healthy roots that are buried deep underground. These roots are roaring out of the soil. Everything it needs. Obviously it's getting it from the sun and the rain.

But the roots are there, roaring out those nutrients. Everything that the plant needs. And I think similarly for us, that God is bringing about something that's deep.

[8 : 49] A deep change in us. You know, that list that we've been reading, those nine fruits of the spirit, it's not like a checklist. Like, right, just take them off.

Let's get them done. It's not a list of nine things that we need to get through. I'm sure we've all got big to-do lists of stuff you want to get done this year. Don't worry, this is not another checklist.

God is not impressed or deceived by outward behaviour. Or the Bible calls it an appearance of godliness. There's this passage in 2 Timothy chapter 3, and it talks about people that are within a church who, on the outside, seemed godly.

You know, they gave some impression that they were godly people. But actually they were denying the power of the Holy Spirit. They were denying the reality of what the spirit was doing in people's lives.

And I think that spiritual fruit, love, joy, peace, this list, spiritual fruit grows from real spiritual life.

[9 : 58] It grows out of life. You know, it brings to mind what Jesus said. Jesus talked about being fruitful, didn't he? He said, I am the vine, you are the branches.

If you remain in me, and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Spirit, spiritual life flows out of being in Jesus, being connected to him, abiding in him.

If you think of an apple tree, has anyone got an apple tree in their garden? Yeah, Craig's nodding his head. You know, do the apples on the tree make the tree come alive?

Do they? No, they don't, do they? The apples on the tree, they don't give life. They are the evidence, they are the sign, that the tree is alive. The fruit itself doesn't produce life.

It's only the life within that tree that produces the fruit. So the fruit of the Holy Spirit only begins to grow because God has caused someone to be born again, to have new life, to be a new creation.

[11 : 09] It's a wonderful images of becoming a Christian. It's this newness of life that starts in you. And if you're not a Christian here today, that is something that you can receive.

You can receive new life from Jesus. And the promise is, as you step into that new life, then this fruit will start to grow as the Holy Spirit works in you. I'm reminded here, I was thinking about it this morning, of my mum and her story of coming to faith.

You know, my mum wasn't born into a Christian family. She doesn't come from a Christian background. In fact, her childhood, her teenage years, even into young adulthood, were really difficult.

She had a really difficult upbringing. Her mum and dad separated. It was just challenging. Maybe you've had an experience like that, where home life is hard. You know, family relationships are difficult.

And it wasn't until my mum was in her 30s, she'd already gotten married, she'd started a family. And then, at that point in her life, she had a really wonderful, powerful encounter with Jesus.

[12 : 19] And her and my dad, both at that point, gave their lives to Jesus. You know, both of them coming from a non-Christian background. And it began a process of transformation in their lives.

You know, they met with Jesus, new life came, and then they started to be transformed by God.

And I would say it still continues to that day. I would say even in, because obviously I didn't know my mum at that point, when I wasn't alive, but even in the time where I've been aware, more and more aware, I have seen my mum continue to grow with God.

It gives us all faith, doesn't it? You know, and all confidence and excitement about the future, whatever stage you're at. But for her, you know, she'd had a tricky upbringing. And maybe that's like you.

She'd had a difficult childhood. And that leaves its mark on people. And my mum has had to go through a process of God changing her, you know, from the inside out.

Not just about her outward appearance. Not just about, am I doing the right stuff? Am I ticking all the right boxes? But a deep inward change that then leads to the things you see on the outside.

[13 : 28] You know, where she lacked nurture in those early years, God, her father, has nurtured her and helped her to become a person of love to others.

Now I see the fruit of God's Holy Spirit at work in her life. It's so clear and it overflows from her to other people. But it all began with that first encounter, that first meeting with Jesus.

Her life started anew and the Spirit began to change her. Now, thinking once more about my garden at home, we are lucky to have a few apple trees.

We don't have, it's not like an orchard or something. You don't be too disappointed when you come around. But we have some apple trees. And some of them, you know, some of them produce great apples. But some of them are mingin', to be honest.

You wouldn't eat them. You know, some of the fruit that comes off them is covered in, like, spots and, like, it's blemished and scarred and it's all misshapen.

[14:33] It's not like how you'd want an apple to be if you went to the supermarket anyway. But perhaps for you, when you look at the list of the fruit that we've been reading about in the book of Galatians, perhaps you look at that list and you think to yourself, actually, my life doesn't look a lot like that.

I'm not the most patient person. You know? I do lack self-control. I'm sure all of us can, you know, there'll be things in that list you think, I struggle with that.

Perhaps you feel yourself a bit scarred or a bit blemished. Just want to offer you hope that Jesus always, whether it's the first time or the hundredth time, always offers a new start, a new life, a new experience of his life flowing through us.

And just to remember that the goal of our lives is not this fruit. It's not this ticking off the list. It's not to become a more loving person or a more peaceful person.

The goal is knowing Jesus. The goal is Jesus. Jesus is the one we want to know. This stuff flows out of that. So, healthy fruit comes from having healthy roots.

[15:52] Healthy roots in God. And the second one, and this is disappointing, I'm afraid, but in the society we live in, which is all fast-paced, fast-paced, fast-paced, fast-paced, fruit grows, what do you think, fast or slow?

Slowly. Fruit grows gradually. Unless, sorry, I might be wrong, there might be some fruit that grows overnight. Maybe there is, but in my experience, fruit grows gradually. You know, we had that glut of fruit in July.

It takes a whole year before it happens again. And then another whole year, you know. In nature, fruit grows slowly. It grows gradually. You can't see, even if you sat there next to the plant, you can't see it growing.

Sorry. You can't see the growth in real time. But it is happening. You can't see it, but it is happening nonetheless. And you only notice it after a passage of time. It reminds me of what we do.

So, my family, we go a couple of times a year to the island of Iona. Give me a whoop if you've been. I know some people have heard of it. It's on the west coast of Scotland. We're going there tomorrow, actually. And the weather's looking good.

[16:57] 12 degrees, guys. Whoa. Whoa. It's looking good. So, yeah, we do that a couple of times a year. And in the summer, when there's lots of us there, like Sha's family and all the kids' cousins and stuff, there's a bit in the house where we go and they line up and they get their heights measured on the wall, like on the door frame kind of thing.

You might do that at your house. I think the Hales have got something similar here. Now, during the course of the rest of the year, I cannot see my kids grow. You know, again, as much as hard as I try, I notice it from time to time, but you can't see them growing.

But each year we come to do that and it's like, wow, they have grown this much. And some of the other cousins who are gigantic have grown like that much in a year. It is absolutely crazy and it's remarkable.

But growth can seem slow. Day to day, growth can seem very slow. And in the same, you know, whether it's people, plants, fruit, or spiritual growth, it can seem slow sometimes.

In fact, it can be very much up and down. You can have these mountaintop experiences. You can have these valley moments. You can have breakthroughs and you can have setbacks.

[18:07] And it can feel a bit confusing, a bit disappointing sometimes. However, here's a bit of truth on this journey.

This is what God says, a few scriptures, just really quickly. God says this about the journey we're on. He says in Philippians 1.6, God, who began a good work in you, will carry it on to completion.

He began a good work, he will carry it on. 2 Corinthians 3.16, We are being transformed into his marriage with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

And today we've read in Galatians 5, verse 16, Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. We can trust God that he has, he has begun a work in us.

And he will continue to do a transforming work in us as we walk by the Holy Spirit. There's this little phrase the Apostle Paul uses in another part of the book of Galatians.

[19:14] He says, He says, My dear children, He's writing to the church, My dear children, For whom I am again in the pains of childbirth, Until Christ is formed in you.

Christ is formed in you. You know, being formed into the likeness of Christ Christ is not quick. It's not a quick fix.

As much as we wish it was, as much as you wish you could just get it on Amazon, next day delivery, it doesn't happen like that. It is a slow and gradual process.

And I had to sort of think to myself, as I've been preparing, you know, what has God been doing in my life? And in terms of a slow process, and maybe it's a helpful thing, you know, just to think for yourself, what has God been doing in my life?

And many of you know, I'm a primary teacher, so I'm on holiday now, which is great. But usually during the week, I'm a primary school teacher, and I've been doing that for about 10 years now.

[20 : 17] And I think, you could probably guess which area of my life I've needed help with as a school teacher and as a parent, it is patience. Patience. I wonder if anyone else here needs patience.

I think Mike was referring to these words earlier when he shared. It comes up in the Old Testament a lot. It says, the Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, slow to anger and rich in love. Man, we all need a lot of help with that. We want to be like him, don't we? Slow to anger. And I know that I'm not there yet, and I never will be.

You know, I'm not going to be like him completely, but we're heading that way. We're on that trajectory. And I would say, looking over my work as a teacher over the last decade, I know that God has been helping me.

Because there are challenges I face now, which I could never have faced at the start of my career. There are things now I can cope with that I could never have hoped with, whether it's children or staff sometimes, you know?

[21 : 23] There are things that happen, and I think, wow, somehow, we're getting through this. We're coping. We're managing. And I think God has helped me to stay calm.

God has helped me to understand the children I work with. And there'll be things for you like that as well. When you look back over your life as a Christian, I wonder, what has God been doing?

God has been doing something. I wonder what it is and what it looks like for you. I wonder how God has been shaping you slowly, shaping you carefully, shaping you intentionally, in the middle of the life you lead, you know, the situations you face.

Spiritual fruit grows gradually. And just to finish that point, I was reminded this week of our course that we did in small groups called Practicing the Way, which many of you will have taken part in.

And there was a really good session. You remember how they had the guest speakers come on. They did like a five-minute thing. And there was this American lady called Tish Harrison Warren.

And she just had some really helpful advice for spiritual growth.

[22 : 36] So I'll watch back again. And I just thought it's really helpful just to share. And she spoke about this myth or fantasy that we sometimes have as Christians. And this is the fantasy we have.

We often think that we would know and walk through Jesus so much more closely if only we had like a monastic lifestyle, you know, like a monk or a nun, where we could spend long periods of time and stillness and contemplation.

And this is what she says about that, this fantasy. She says, there is a temptation, that the temptation there is, is that we dream of what it would be like to seek Jesus and be followed by him.

And we never learn to experience that in the actual life that we live. Spiritual growth or spiritual formation has to start with the context that we are in.

The frustrations that we have. The limits we have. The vocation we have. This can sometimes feel disappointing. It can feel like it's not enough.

[23 : 41] It can feel like we're screwing it up. It can sometimes feel like God is somewhere else out there in a different sort of life. But the only place to really meet Jesus is in the moments of real life.

That is where God is waiting for us. I just find that really helpful because I do think, and for myself, we can believe that myth sometimes.

You know, if only life was like this. If you've got young kids, you'd be thinking, if only I had 10 minutes to myself. And there is a place for that, isn't there?

You know, of course there is. Of course there's a place for these times where we get to pray and be with God in stillness. But if it's not happening in your life right now, will it ever happen?

You know? And she goes on to say, actually I need to be growing in God now, otherwise I'll miss it. You know? I can't wait. Five years, ten years, twenty years, waiting for everything to fall in line.

[24 : 47] And I need to speak that into my own life. And be speaking to myself and saying, actually, Luke, don't wait. Don't wait. Seek God now. He's here.

He's present. He's present in the stress. He's present in the, whatever you're going through. And the thing is, it's not just about me. The Holy Spirit is doing this.

He is committed to helping you grow in the middle of everything that's going on in your life. But it might be slow. It might be gradual. But he is doing it.

Just to finish, what part do you play? What part do we play in this? Do we wait like a spectator? You know, do we just watch and see what happens? Well, I think it's something more than that.

So God calls us to something more than this. At the beginning of the reading that Dee read for us today, we heard the words, walk by the Spirit. And then at the very end, we heard the phrase, live by the Spirit.

[25 : 47] Walk by the Spirit. Live by the Spirit. Walk by the Spirit. Live by the Spirit. You know, it's really clear, isn't it? It's very simple. We are to actively follow the Holy Spirit.

Just like if you went, maybe you've got a plan over the holidays. If you're adventurous, you might have a plan to go for a walk. You know, you might plan to go up a mountain. Scotland's full of them. Well, you would be wise to take a map. And you would be wise to take that map and check it again and again to keep you on course. Once, Char and I didn't do that.

See, I blamed her there, didn't I? Char didn't bring the map. And it went wrong and we had a three-hour detour and it was pretty bad. But, the same goes for our relationship with God, with our relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Day by day, moment by moment, we are to check in with the Holy Spirit and focus on His leading. A better picture, just as we finish, I'm aware of time, a better picture is even maybe of a child and a parent.

[26 : 48] A little young child and a parent. That child, though they stray off, they are always looking back to mum or dad. They're always looking at me. They're looking for that reassurance. They're looking for that guidance.

And the parent's doing the same. Where have they gone? What are they doing, especially at church? Where have they gone? It's a great picture, isn't it, of that constant thing with us and the Holy Spirit.

God, what are you doing? The Holy Spirit's doing the same with us, always looking. You know, what is living doing now? What is Gordon up to? How can I help them? He's our helper.

He's with us. And it's that intimacy that grows, that connection. So the question, I suppose, is do we have a connection with the Holy Spirit?

Maybe it's this thing that we've been thinking about, a fruit that grows in our life, it comes from connection with God through the Holy Spirit. Well, if you feel that actually that connection has maybe dwindled or, you know, grown stale or grown old, the good news is the Holy Spirit loves to come alongside.

[28 : 00] The Holy Spirit is eager to come and help to fill us afresh. I'm...