

## “*Fruit of the Spirit: Bearing Fruit*”

Deuteronomy 11:8-17, 26-28 • Galatians 5:13-26

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • September 20, 2020

As some of you know, one of the things I enjoy doing – when I can find the time – is gardening. Quick show of hands, how many of you enjoy gardening? How many of you don’t but you attempt it anyway? I am constantly amazed at planting a little seed and seeing a big plant come out of the dirt. My problem is that I don’t like having to wait so long to see results. A number of years ago I got a book that sounded perfect for me. It was called *The Impatient Gardener*. It didn’t help. Well, the part I read didn’t help. I never finished reading it.

You see, you can’t really rush the growth process. If you’ve ever bought packets of seeds you’ve probably noticed on the back it says something like, “number of days to germinate.” That’s how long you should expect to wait until the seeds sprout. Sometimes they take longer. But the seed packets, especially those for vegetables, also usually a place where it says, “Days to Harvest” or “Days to Maturity.” This packet of cucumber seeds says it takes 60 days and this packet of broccoli says they should take 75 days. That’s not a guarantee. It’s just an estimate, an average that the seed company found in their test gardens.

I have discovered over the years that you can’t really speed up that process. There’s no way to make these broccoli seeds produce edible broccoli in two weeks. I’ve tried. But at least with things like cucumbers and broccoli you can see the progress. The worst for me are the ones you can’t see, like carrots. I get impatient waiting and they have all that greenery on top that I end up pulling some of them up to see if they’re ready. They never are. When it comes to growing things like vegetables or fruits you just have to let the plant do its work.

God tells us that it’s the same for our spiritual life. This morning we are beginning a new series on one of the most familiar passages of the New Testament – the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5. “But the fruit of the Spirit is

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

Over the next few weeks we are going to look at each one of these and talk about what it means for your life. But first we need to understand what Paul means by “fruit of the Spirit.” The first thing we need to see is that it says fruit, singular, and not *fruits*, plural. It’s not that love and joy and peace are different, separate fruits of the Spirit in our lives. It’s that all of them together make up the fruit of the Spirit. One commentator describes it like this: “these virtues are not nine different gems, but nine different facets of the same dazzling jewel.” Then he says, “There is only one fruit, which every Christian produces, albeit in varying quantities and with different degrees of sweetness.” The goal of the Christian life is to become like Jesus. That means the fruit that we produce is holiness, just like Jesus who was perfectly holy. In fact, the fruit of the Spirit perfectly describes Jesus.

The second thing we need to notice is that this is the fruit of the *Spirit*. In other words, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are the evidence of the Holy Spirit working in your life. You don’t have these virtues by trying harder. Have you ever tried to make yourself have joy, peace, and patience when you are angry? I’m not saying it’s necessarily impossible, but it’s highly unlikely. But as you become more like Jesus you will find that you have more and more of these virtues.

Now, just because you can’t produce the fruit of the Spirit doesn’t mean you can just sit around and wait for God to just change you. We have a part to play in this. There is nothing you can do to earn salvation but you can either resist or cooperate with God in what we call *sanctification* – the process of becoming more like Christ. For example, this packet of cucumber seeds says that they should germinate in 8 days

and be ready to harvest around 60 days. But it hasn't happened. Apparently I've had this packet of seeds for ten years. It says, "packaged for 2010 season." But not one seed has even sprouted much less produced a cucumber. Why? Because I never planted them! I didn't do my part.

If I want my seeds to grow and produce fruit I need to prepare the soil and plant the seeds. I need to keep them watered and fertilize them once they start growing. Paul calls this walking by the Spirit. In order to bear fruit you and I must do the things that create the best environment for that fruit to grow. Over the last two thousand years Christians have called these things spiritual disciplines. The Apostle Paul writes to his young apprentice Timothy and says, "train yourself for godliness." You will never really grow spiritually without training.

In our culture today, the idea of discipline sometimes has a negative connotation, especially when it comes to our religious life. We would rather be free and spontaneous than disciplined and structured.

There was once a farmer who set out early in the morning to milk his cows. On the way to the barn he passed the hen house and decided to stop and gather the eggs. As he opened the gate he noticed that one of the hinges was broken and so he went to get his tools. On the way to the tool shed he noticed that the faucet was dripping and decided to go the hardware store to get a washer.

The point of this story is that the farmer was completely spontaneous. But because he had no discipline, he was not able to accomplish anything. Rather than being free, he was a slave to his spontaneity. In our spiritual lives we need disciplines or practices to promote spiritual growth. It doesn't just happen on its own. As author Donald Whitney says, "The only road to Christian maturity and Godliness, or Christ-likeness, passes through the practice of Spiritual Disciplines."

What do we mean by spiritual disciplines? It's not as hard as you might think. Maybe the biggest is making time to be with God every day.

This is an intentional time of reading Scripture, meditating on how it applies to your life, and praying. There are lots of other disciplines that we find in the Bible that have helped Christians grow in their faith. Worship is a discipline. So is giving generously. Times of silence and solitude. Journaling. Even celebrating can be considered a spiritual discipline because it helps you learn joy.

But not all of the spiritual disciplines involve doing something. Some of them are what are known as disciplines of abstinence. These are the disciplines of *NOT* doing something. In addition to preparing the soil, planting the seeds, watering and fertilizing them, I also have to regularly go out and pull the weeds that grow up around my plants. Otherwise they will choke them out and rob them of sunlight and nutrients.

The same is true of your spiritual life. In verse 19 Paul says, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, *and things like these.*" He adds that at the end in case he left out *your* favorite sin. These are some of the things that will choke out your godliness. They will get in the way of you becoming like Jesus. That's why he says, "I warn you, as I warned you before, that those make a practice of doing such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." He's warning us to see these weeds in our spiritual garden and pull them out so that the Holy Spirit can produce fruit in our lives.

So let me encourage you to find ways to practice some of these spiritual disciplines. Practice the disciplines of abstinence, pulling those weeds from your life, and practice the disciplines of engagement so that your life will be fertile ground for God to work. Because He will. The Holy Spirit will work with whatever you are willing to give Him and begin to change your life so that you bear much fruit. As Jesus said in John 15, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

*Amen.*