

The fruit of the Spirit, part 1: Love

The key to healthy friendships, businesses,
and marriages

Message for Sunday, January 17, 2016
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Galatians 5:16-26; John 15:1-5;
1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Children's Message: Galatians 5:22-23
Need: lots of balloons of different colours (purple for grapes, orange for oranges, etc). Before worship, pin balloons on someone's clothes, so they are just about covered with balloons.

The Bible tells us that we can ask Jesus to come and live in us. When Jesus does that, when Jesus is living in us, he works in us to make us more like him.

The Bible says that when Jesus is living in us, we will have the "fruit of the Spirit." You can go to an apple tree and pick apples. Well, the Spirit of Jesus lives in us, so that makes us like a "Spirit tree." And just like you get apples from an apple tree, we have fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23, New International Version:
The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

When Jesus lives in us, we will have more love, more joy, and so on.

Oh look, here comes someone who has lots of fruit! What kind of fruit is Jesus making in your life?

Person points to the various coloured balloons, such as red for love, yellow for joy, and so on. "Ever since Jesus came into my life, I have more love and joy than I had before. It just comes more naturally now. I could still use more, but it's a lot better than it was before."

I bring out a small tree stuck in a bucket of dirt. This will be our "fruit tree" for the next few weeks. In fact, it's already growing fruit: (give one of the children a heart shape to put on the tree).

Every week we'll add another fruit. Maybe you'd like to help make the fruit symbols. Let's see: next weeks' fruit is Joy. Would you like to make something to remind us of joy?

Sermon "The fruit of the Spirit, part 1: Love"

1) What kind of fruit are you picking?

Today I'm starting a new series of messages on the "fruit of the Holy Spirit." This isn't fruit like bananas or oranges. It's the kind of fruit that comes as the result of work being done. After you've done a good day's work around your home, fixing it up and making it look nice, you get to sit down and enjoy the *fruit* of your labours. If you run a business and worked hard last year and things went well, you can say that you had a *fruitful* year.

Of course, there's also such a thing as bad fruit. Bad fruit comes from good fruit which has been handled in the wrong way. Someone once said that most sin is the result of something good taken the wrong way. Sex is good; it's a wonderful gift God gave us for marriage. But handle it the wrong way and it becomes sin. Ambition is good: it gives people the drive to excel in their work. But taken the wrong way, it becomes greed and selfish ambition.

Galatians 5:19-23, [New Living Translation]:

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results:

- sexual immorality,
- impure thoughts,
- eagerness for lustful pleasure,
- idolatry,
- participation in demonic activities,
- hostility,
- quarrelling,
- jealousy,
- outbursts of anger,
- selfish ambition,
- divisions,
- the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group,
- envy,
- drunkenness,
- wild parties,
- and other kinds of sin.

Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us:

- love,
- joy,
- peace,
- patience,
- kindness,
- goodness,
- faithfulness,
- gentleness,
- and self-control.

Above is a list of the good and bad fruit which Paul listed in Galatians 5. Paul is describing the battle which goes on in every person. It's the battle between good and evil, between the desire to obey God and the temptation to sin.

You could call this a "checklist of God's will for your life." Go through these two lists right now, and put a check mark by the ones which you see in your life.

One of the things which is clear in the Bible is that God's will is for our own good. God doesn't want to take away our fun; he wants to give us fun, to give us life in all its fullness. Some of the things in the list on the left may look like fun; but in the end, they only bring pain and hurt and destruction into our lives and the lives of those around us.

Life would be so much better if it was full of the things from the list on the right. Those are the things which make life worth living. But they're more than that: they are also the keys to healthy relationships. Whether it's with your friends, in business or in your marriage, these qualities are the keys to healthy relationships. That's what I want to focus on in this series of messages on the fruit of the Spirit: how they are vital to building healthy relationships.

Each message is going to be in two parts: describing what that fruit is, and then exploring ways that we can put it into practice in our relationships.

2) The fruit of the Spirit is the work of the Spirit

But for this first message in the series, I want to do some lay down some foundations, about things common to all the fruits of the Spirit.

As I said at the beginning, good fruit is the result of hard work. BUT: it's not *your* work that produces this fruit. It's the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in your life.

John 15:4-5, New Living Translation:
[Jesus said,] "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 apart from 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."

The key to all of this is to surrender to God, to ask and allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives to change our hearts and our desires. That theme runs throughout the New Testament, and we're going to see it again in this series.

I'll say it again: if you want more love and joy and peace in your life, you don't get it by your own efforts. It comes as a result of committing your life to Jesus Christ, and asking him to come into your life through the Holy Spirit, and for him to make these changes. But also needed is your commitment to obey Jesus Christ as Lord, and to live his way. Together, those things are the keys to true love, joy and peace and all those other things on that list.

To summarize: the fruit of the Spirit comes from the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a person who is open and obedient.

In fact, let's pray right now about this, before we go any further:

Holy Spirit,

I need you in my life. I need the fruit that you produce. I've seen what happens when I try to do things on my own. Now it's time to let you work.

So I ask you to come in and fill me. I ask you to clean out all the obstacles that come between God and me. I ask you to give me a new heart, with a new excitement for God, and a new desire to follow God's ways. I ask you to give me strength to resist temptation.

And right now, fill me with your love, so that I may love others. Amen.

3) Love is a choice

Paul's letter to the Colossians 3:12-13 has a list of commands of how to treat other people. It ends with this:

Colossians 3:14, Today's English Version:

And to all these qualities add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity.

Underline "add love." This is something you choose to do. If love was just a feeling, something over which I had no control, then God couldn't command you to do it.

People talk about "falling love" like it was a feeling that just happened, and there's nothing they could

do about it. In the same way, then, people can say, “I fell out of love. It’s not my fault we’re breaking up. I have no control over it.” God says you can control it, and you are responsible for it. Love is not a feeling; it’s a choice.

4) Love is how I behave

Love, obviously, is a verb. It’s something you do, not just talk about. You see it in how people treat others.

1 John 3:18, New Living Translation:

Let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions.

What does love in action look like? The best answer in the whole Bible to this is in 1 Corinthians 13.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7, New Living Translation:

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

This passage is often read at weddings. But it’s not just about married love; in fact, that section of the Bible says nothing at all about marriages or weddings. It’s simply describing how love works. In other words, it applies to *all* relationships.

Go through this as another checklist of God’s will for your life.

Which of these words describe me in my relationships with others?

- patient: willing to wait; make allowances for others
- kind: care for others in everyday ways; forgiving
- not jealous: trustful of loved ones; content with what I have
- not boastful: not putting myself above others
- not proud: humble
- not rude: considerate of others
- not demand my own way: not self-centred
- not irritable: not easily upset when I don’t get what I want
- keep no record of when I have been wronged: forgive easily
- not glad about injustice: not vengeful
- rejoices whenever the truth wins out: even when I look bad
- never give up: always ready to give more, do more
- never lose faith: always trust
- always hopeful: can see the possible, not just the problem
- endure through every circumstance: always persevere

Let me give you an example of what I mean by “Love is a choice” and “Love is a behaviour.” Psychologist George Crane tells of a woman who came to him for help in getting out of her marriage. The woman said that she hated her husband and wanted a divorce. The reason she came to see a psychologist instead of a lawyer: “I want to hurt him as much as I can,” she declared bitterly.

“Well, in that case,” said Dr. Crane, “I advise you to start showering him with compliments. When you have become indispensable to him, when he thinks you love him dearly, then walk out and tell him you are divorcing him.”

The woman was intrigued by this novel approach. Two months later she returned for her followup session and reported that all was going well. “Good,” said Dr. Crane, “now’s the time to file for divorce.” “Divorce?” she responded. “Never! I love my husband.”

You see, we can’t choose our feelings. But we can and do choose our behaviours. You choose to behave in a loving way toward someone—even if you don’t feel like it—and the feelings will follow. Love is a choice.

Love is a choice. But it’s not just a choice that you make towards another person. More than anything, it’s a choice that you make towards Jesus. If you’ve never made this decision, it’s a choice you must make. In fact, if you’ve never made this decision, then you actually have *already* made your choice.

The choice is this: who is going to be # 1 in your life? Are you going to put Jesus at the top, and commit yourself to following his way? And will you open yourself to the Holy Spirit to fill you and change you?

Next Steps:

- Those lists with checkboxes are mirrors into your soul. Are you happy with what you see?
- Let’s assume we all could use some improvement. There are two ways to do this: try harder by yourself; ask the Holy Spirit to work in your life, and be willing to follow his leading.