

# Grow! Theological and Biblical Foundation

## What are the fruits of the Spirit?

The Fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 6 describes the harvest of godliness when the Holy Spirit is active in our lives. St. Paul uses the singular ‘fruit’ just as we celebrate the ‘harvest’ at Thanksgiving. It’s a singular word even though the full harvest includes many different crops.

The Fruit of the Spirit is an abundant crop that shows our character is becoming more similar to that of Jesus. The work of the Holy Spirit has many parallels to farming. Start with the parable that Jesus told comparing our lives to fields of rocks or hard packed soil that prevents growth. A harvest of Holy Spirit virtues cannot grow in a life distracted by the cares of the world or short-term interest.

Corn and watermelons can grow in a matter of months, but oak trees take years. The fruit of the Holy Spirit can come to us quickly. In times of stress and fear we can have a depth of patience and self-control not known in our lives before.

Other fruit can take much longer to cultivate only by repeatedly practicing the deep sacrificial love of Jesus. A life filled with joy takes much deeper roots than fleeting moments of joy.

It is still true that we reap what we sow. If your life is filled with tension, anxiety or want, it is good opportunity to ask what has been planted. We may have many people planting things in our lives, but if we neglect the discipline of knowing the Holy Spirit, the Fruit of the Spirit is less likely to be our harvest.

## Teaching Children the Fruit of the Spirit

Unlike many VBS curricula which focus on stories, Grow! challenges churches to teach virtues. Sometimes with stories, sometimes with more abstract ideas, children can be exposed to short-term and long-term character traits of Christian maturity.

Stuart Briscoe suggests we think of *fruit* instead of *fruits* lest we think we can be picky about our personal preferences and behaviors. St. Paul took them as a group, a full harvest of Spirit-filled living, and they complement one another (Briscoe 5).

In Methodist language, the Fruit of the Spirit the result of God’s sanctifying grace in our lives. Prevenient Grace is God’s love that woos us into a relationship with God; God has loved us before we knew God or thought we needed God. Justifying Grace is the gift of God that we might be saved, step over the threshold onto God’s side, so to speak. Our relationship with God is not finished in the moment of justification, however. God asks us to grow into Christian maturity, stripping off “every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that trips us up” (Hebrews 12:1, NLT). Growing in the Fruit of the Spirit is the product of both Spirit activity and human response. It comes from obedience to God’s commands to love, be patient, kind, and self-controlled, but it also takes dependence on God’s power, through the Spirit, to make it possible (Briscoe 10).

### More Than Learning a List

It is easy to teach children a list of rules of good or bad behavior. Any list can be memorized, but memorization does not have the power to transform us. When we introduce children to the Holy Spirit, who can change our character, the external rules fall away. What we do is less important because of who we are... and *whose* we are.

Growing in the Fruit of the Spirit is the Apostle Paul’s way of saying that having the Holy Spirit live in us produces a harvest of godliness. The Holy Spirit fell upon Jesus as his baptism and the rest of his ministry was the fruit of the Spirit. From the temptation in the wilderness to the joy of raising a widow’s son to forgiving those who killed him, Jesus’ character revealed that he was filled with the fruit

of the Spirit. To bear the fruit of the Spirit is to bear the character of Jesus himself. It's possible to look at nearly any story about Jesus in the gospels through the lens of the Fruit of the Spirit. We can ask children which of the Spiritual harvest seems most evident when Jesus heals, teaches, stands silent during his trial, and finally willingly goes to the cross. Jesus life, death, and resurrection is the list in action.

The Fruit of the Spirit is not something God gave the church after Pentecost. Jesus embodies this harvest at all times. To be Christlike is to have the plentiful spiritual harvest!

### **More than Outward Actions**

On the other hand, we want to avoid legalism, the practice of virtues hoping it will score points with God to create a relationship with God. We do not earn the Fruit by our good behavior. A life in the Spirit is not done to satisfy a legal demand as if the focus is on the deed. No, the focus is on the recipient of the deed. This is true freedom. The Christian community is built up when many are harvesting these virtues. Ask yourself how many can be harvested in isolation. Mature Christians share the fruit with others without regard to the response. Sharing the Fruit of the Spirit cannot compel another to answer in a particular way as if they are forever in debt to those who helped them (Cousar 128).

### **Planting, Ripening, and Reproducing**

Fruit always comes from the same place: seed planted in soil with growing conditions like water, sunlight, and fertilizer. The same is true in Vacation Bible School. For some students, this week will be seed planting. For others, it will be cultivating (removing weeds), and still others will see this as a season of growth. Consider what words, actions, and worship will make the soil more fertile. Don't be disappointed if – at the end of the week – students appear more fruity than fruitful. Don't stop praying for them either, the ultimate water, sunlight, and fertilizer.

Teachers and leaders should keep their eyes open to which students might have a ripeness to certain fruit. If a student shows particular kindness or self-control, it's good to celebrate it as soon as possible. It's even better to tell his or her parents in front of the student! Children and adults may not have ripeness in all areas, but that does not prevent us from celebrating what is ripe.

If particular students or adults have displayed ripeness in a particular fruit, how could they teach about it from a first-hand perspective? Do certain professions in the congregation (e.g., nurses or teachers) exhibit particular fruit? This shows that the Fruit is useful in all relationship, not just in church.

### **Spiritual Fruit and Spiritual Gifts**

The Fruit of the Spirit are character traits of maturing Christians. They are shared in community settings. Although not all Christians will have an abundance of all fruit, they should expect to have some of all the fruit.

The Gifts of the Spirit (i.e., 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12: 3-8) are functions given to individuals for the common good (1 Cor. 12: 7). As gifts from the Spirit, they are given as the Spirit decides. Gifts can come and go depending on the needs of the community. Be careful that one's desire to have a particular gift is not for personal glory. On the other hand, it is nearly impossible to selfishly ask for more Spiritual Fruit.

## **Resources**

There are plenty of good background books available at Amazon.com or ABEbooks.com. They instruct about the Fruit as a harvest as well as each individual virtue. They will give a list of biblical cross-references for each virtue.

Boice, James. The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 10: Galatians. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI., 1976

Briscoe, Stuart. The Fruit of the Spirit: Cultivating Christian Character. Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, Ill., 1983

Cousar, Charles. Interpretation: Galatians. John Knox Press, Louisville, KY. , 1982

Hilton, Thomas. Ripe Life: Sermons on the Fruit of the Spirit. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 1993