
Articles on the Fruit of the Spirit

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

Introduction to the *Fruit of the Spirit*

Romans 5:1-5; 12:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:1-14:40; Galatians 5:16-26; Ephesians 4:1-6:20; 2 Peter 1:3-9

What does the work and empowerment of the Spirit mean to you?

What is the Fruit of the Spirit?

The Fruit of the Spirit is God's love and work in us, the love of Christ flowing in through His Holy Spirit in and out of us! All because we have a personal relationship with Christ, we have God's living presence in us, living in us. The result is we have the ability to reflect His Fruit and character. In addition, this is a moral obligation on our part to live out our New Life in Christ effectively. This then becomes our visible evidence of our relationship and growth in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior that is contagious and affects others. We display Christ by our manner, demeanor, and temperament. Thus, the Fruit we make becomes the influence and the display case of His transforming power. We do not do this alone; He gives us the Holy Spirit, God's active love and work within and through us so we bear and convey His attributes of Fruit and character. This means we "cultivate," *add to* as in *supplement* His Fruit, God's empowering love for us, which we are given and then we are to continue to build up by our faith development so we are able to pass this on to others (Isa. 27:6; Hos. 10:1; 14:8; Matt. 3:8; Rom. 6:22; Eph. 5:9; Phil. 1:11).

This Fruit cultivation and production by our walk in Him creates and sets the tone for our behaviors and conduct with one another. This shows off our Lord; as we know Him, we make Him known just by our attitude. This is a cooperative endeavor that happens by our growing and close intimate relationship with Christ. As we grow by faith, which is our devotion, trust, obedience and conviction in Him, we make more and better Fruit. All this by what we add to, and what He then multiplies. Just like adding yeast to dough makes it grow, but in our case it is not meager air, it is The Holy Spirit at work in us. This synergy of our faith in Christ is to facilitate our active pursuit of Love as a spiritual Fruit that is built from our wondrous and incredible collaboration that we have with God to produce real, godly commitment, conviction, and the demonstration of our obedience. This is what helps form our character and mature, effectual Christian life. It gives us the fiber of our moral center that stretches throughout our being, embracing and holding our relationships and opportunities together when it is sealed as a choice and commitment, and not just a feeling. The Fruit of the Spirit will synergistically combine with the other godly characteristics of our Lord to promote our ability to relate and grow in our personal faith. In so doing, we grow in our relationships, to be better to and for Him as well as others and ourselves. This is the essential essence that builds

healthy families, marriages, and relationships in general, as well as healthy churches—all because we are modeling Christ! We become His display case (John 1:1,14; 14:23; Gal. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:24; 1 John 4:8; 14-15).

The Fruit of the Spirit is described as a fruit because it is made up of more than one substance. Just like any fruit from a tree, such as an apple or an orange, it has juice, pulp, peel, core, segments, and seeds, all held together by a skin or rind, and attached to the tree by a stem where its nutrients flow in. So it is with our relationship in Christ. If you just eat of the pulp or juice and throw out the rest, how can you grow more without the seeds? If you take the fruit off the vine and do not use it, no nutrients will flow in and thus it will wither and rot. If the vine is not cared for, the tree will die. So it is with the Fruit of the Spirit, and so it is with our relationship with Christ as well as our relationships with others for the faith. God makes it and it requires the efforts of our fostering this spiritual development from our growth of faith that necessitates our tending. It is more than just one substance; all of its substances combined are greater than the sum of its parts creating “synergy” of faith. Thus, the Fruit of the Spirit is the physical, empowering essence from our healthy, growing relationship with the Holy Spirit that gives us the active application of a transformed life that showcases who Christ is as well as inspires and affects others. In order to become more mature believers and build healthier churches, we must learn and understand these essential attributes (Hab. 2:4; John 15; Rom. 12; Phil. 2:13).

How many Fruit(s) of the Spirit’s are there?

Is it “Fruit” of the Spirit or is it “Fruits” of the Spirit? There are nine or more fruits, so it must be a plural? Yes and no; in the Greek language, it is referred to as “singular,” meaning one Fruit. In classic Reformed and Evangelical theology, it is listed as both (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* the definitive work and many other references too), but the singular is the more correct way to refer to it. Then there is the number; is it nine, twelve, or more? Catholics add modesty, continence, and chastity, which they get from the Latin *Vulgate* translation. Then 2 Peter 1 gives a slightly different listing. Basically, most biblical theologians look to the Galatians nine and the others, more than seventy total, are referred to as virtues or “characters.” Let us first take a quick look at the main nine Fruit(s) of the Spirit that flow from God’s work and love working in us. These all flow from love and cooperate as one in one another (Galatians 5:22-23):

The Galatian Fruits:

- **Love** will enable us to appreciate our brothers and sisters in the Lord and, of course, our family and others around us. Love is taking the initiative to build up and meet the needs of others, without expecting anything in return. We must allow *love* to be the foundation of our relationships—the love of our Lord that He gives us. Love manifests patience and kindness and it is not greedy or jealous; it is not prideful nor brags of one’s accomplishments. It is not rude or self-seeking, and it allows one not to be easily angered. By this, we do not keep record of

others wrongs or enjoy it when bad things happen to others; rather, we rejoice with others to build them up. Love always looks after others, shows trust, hope, and always carries on. Love encapsulates the purpose and role of Fruit, and thus, our furthestmost goal, as followers of Christ, is to do all things in love (John 13:1; 15:13; 1 Corinthians 13:3-8; Galatians 5:22-23; 1 John 4:16).

- **Joy** is our focus on Christ as Lord; this allows us to enjoy our relationship with Him, His creation, and others, regardless of our circumstances, with an expression of delight and real, authentic happiness that comes from and with harmony with God and others. *Joy* in James refers to declaring our situation as happy and fulfilling, even when it is not. It is to change our mindset and focus. It is realizing the sovereignty of God and that He is in control, even when life seems to be turned upside down and inside out! Joy helps us understand God's perspective and gives us the confidence and patience to endure anything. Joy is not happiness, because we may not be content and pleased with it; rather, joy is hope. It is our real hope. It is not a meager wish; rather, it is the unshakable confidence of our future in Christ. Our pleasure comes from knowing He is in charge and caring for us (Psalm 32:7-9; 34:1-8; Proverbs 15:13; John 15:11; 17:13; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Thess. 5:18; 1 Peter 4:13-19; Hebrews 10:34; 12:2; James 1:1-4)!
- **Peace** is surrendering and yielding ourselves to the Lord to be in His control, for He is our ultimate peace! In so doing, tranquility will be our tone, control, and our composure. This will be fueled from our harmonious relationship with God—handing over control of our hearts, will, and minds to Him. We are willing to make peace with others because we have found peace with God. Thus, we can live at peace with our neighbors, proclaiming serenity and rekindling it when it goes down or is lost. Peace is unity, which is more important than just resolving trivial disagreements. Our focus must be on edifying and encouraging—such things, unfortunately, rare in the church today! We will either lift people up or bring them down, something we need to know so as to pursue peace and harmony and not let the childish and petty things of life divide us. Our focus must be on keeping our own accounts straight and not worrying or interfering with others. This helps make us peacemakers. Once we make real peace with God, we will be able to make and maintain peace with others. When we are at peace with God, we need to be at peace with ourselves emotionally, and others relationally (Isaiah. 26:3; Matthew 5:9; Luke 19:42; John 14:27; 16:33; Romans 5:1; 12:18; Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 3:15; Philippians 4:7).
- **Patience**, in some translations is *called Longsuffering*; this calls for showing tolerance and fortitude toward others, even accepting difficult situations with them—and God—without making demands or conditions. Patience is our “staying power.” It is like perseverance and the endurance to not give up; it is about actively overcoming our situation—not just sitting, accepting, and doing nothing! It allows us to endure a less than desirable situation, to make us better, more useful, and even optimistic and prudent. Hence, its other name,

longsuffering. It allows us to put up with others who “get on our nerves” without losing other characteristics of grace (Hosea 2:19-23; Psalm 33:20; Matthew 27:14; Romans 5:3; 12:12; Galatians 5:1; 5:22-23; Colossians 1:11; James 1:3-4,12; 5:10-11).

- **Kindness** is the medium through which Christ’s love becomes real, tangible, and knowable through us. It is the application of sincere love that manifests itself in practicing benevolence and a loving attitude towards others. Kindness is the essence that shows the world we are Christians, like the fragrance coming from a beautiful flower. It is being convicted with God’s Word, and then modeling it to others. Being charitable is an aspect of good positive relationships of others, and a "MUST" part of the Christian experience and duty! Kindness is the subject to the object of who we are in Christ. This is something we replicate as we are kind, and also respond in kindness to others, our response to one another fuels the other’s response, and so forth. In this way, we will be escalating love and kindness instead of repression and dysfunction (Romans 2:1-4; 12:9-21; 2 Corinthians 6:6-7; Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-14; 1 John 3:16-23)!
- **Goodness** is the engagement of love that shows the application of Christ, His righteousness, and Truth. This models it to others in the action of love, making Christ and us attractive and inviting. This is God at work in our faith, so we are synergized with His power and then engage it to others. This is the fruit that makes people liked by and even lovable to others. This displays integrity, honesty, and compassion to others, and allows us to do the right thing. It is doing the right thing, even when it does not feel like we should, as Joseph did. He was betrayed and sold as a slave, yet, he chose to make his situation into something good, and to help and treat others better than he needed to. Why are we to be good? Because God is good to us (Psalm 86:5; 145:4-13)! Goodness is the model for people to repent and accept Christ (Amos 5:15; Proverbs 25:22; Matthew 19:16; Romans 12:17; Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 5:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; 1 Peter 3:11; 2 Peter 1:3-8).
- **Faithfulness** is the application of our faith in action; because we are saved by Christ, He dwells in our hearts. Thus, we are infused with dependability because as we praise His name, it hits home in our being. It is not faith itself; rather, it is the fruit and character of faith. It is the “gluing” fruit that will preserve our faith and the other characters of the Spirit, and identify God's will, so we can be dependable and trusting to God and others. Faith is the one fruit that we give back to God, whereas faithfulness and the other fruits, virtues, and characters are from the Spirit working in us! Faithfulness is authenticity that is so absent today and so badly needed to show the power and motivation for Christian living. Because God is trustworthy with us, we can be faith-worthy in Him (Psalm 119: 89-90; Isaiah 25:1; Matthew 17:19; 25:21; Romans 1:17; 5:1-2; 1 Corinthians 12:9; Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 3:16-17; Hebrews 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:24)!

- **Gentleness**, sometimes referred to as *Meekness*, is the fruit that will show calmness, personal care, and tenderness in meeting the needs of others. It is to be more than just a personality; it is to be who we are by the work of the Spirit within us. This is not weakness or a lack of strength; rather, it is being humble and gentle toward God and others. This also means being nonresistant to God and His work in us. Gentleness produces a desire and effort to please God and to submit our will and aspirations to His will and what is best. By keeping our focus on Christ with humility, we can endure being personally attacked (Psalm 37:11; Isaiah. 40:11; 42:2-3; Galatians 5:22-23; Philippians 4: 5; Matthew 5:5; 11:29; 12:15; Ephesians 4:1-2; 2 Timothy 2:24; 1 Thessalonians 2:7).
- **Self-Control**, sometimes referred to as *Temperance*, is allowing God to be in control of our will and hearts, and to be diligent in seeking the Spirit to enable us. We can know what not to do, and guard the areas in which we are weak. This will allow us to have discipline and restraint, with obedience to God and others. It is not allowing distractions to derail or remove us from His will and plan, so we will not be held back from what Christ has called us to do. This comes down to how we trust in our Lord, we can trust God for the future because we can see what He has done in the past (Proverbs 16:32; 25:28; Romans 13: 12-14; 1 Corinthians 6:12; 9:25-27; Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Thessalonians 5: 22; Titus 2:12; Hebrews 12:2; 2 Peter 1:5-7).

The “extra” 2 Peter Fruits:

The order of the Fruits in Second Peter differs from the one in Galatians 5, because they not listed as comprehensive or in a sequential order like in Galatians where each one is a stage that begets the next one. Rather, in Second Peter, they are arranged in rhetorical “sorites,” a type of argument that uses syllogisms to build to the climax of the most important one, *love*. Each end is a “bookend” that holds the others; faith is what we all start with. It is the foundation. Then others build to the pre-eminent, essential significance of what love is, the quintessential fruit of the Christian life.

- **Righteousness**, in this context, refers to God being Righteous, thus He is ethical and fair in His dealings with us so we can be fair with others. Also, in Peter, the word used to refer to people who are *righteous* means *virtuous* and of *good character*. Faith is impartial in its acceptance; it sees no race, creed, culture, time, place, or person, for we are purely justified by His will and purpose, which He vicariously placed upon us (Rom. 3:22-23; 4:6; 1 Pet. 2:24; 4:18; 2 Pet. 2:5, 21; 3:13).
- **Knowledge** means the fundamental saving knowledge we need in order to know whom Christ is before He can be our Savior (Matt. 11:27). This refers to what is true and real and that God can only be known through Christ; the more we know His precepts, the more we can grow. It denounces what is esoteric, manipulating, or counterfeit. Peter uses this word as a baseline of truth to attack false doctrine.

The Christian message, if it is real in our lives, will affect our attitudes, disposition, and lifestyles (Luke 11:42; 18:10-14; John 1:18; 14:1-6; Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Pet. 1:2-3, 8; 2:20).

- **Godliness** a synopsis of character that shows our attitude and moral fiber means living out our disposition with respect and reverence to Christ in all aspects of our life. This is about how we are to others, how we treat one another, either good or bad. We are called to virtue; this refers to being pious and living a good, reverent life toward God and others because of what Christ has done in us. It is a response from our worship of Christ with an authentic desire to know Him in a greater way. It creates our desire to be pious, which means to rearrange our priorities, mindsets, and character to line up with God's character and be able to see the importance of virtue, therefore becoming equipped to use it to value others. We rearrange our priorities, mindsets, and character to line up with God's character, so to see the importance of virtue and then be equipped to use it to value others. Godliness is a collection of personality traits within our personality that show our attitude, moral fiber, and how we treat one another—good or bad—which is what Character is. This results from being pious and living a good, reverent life toward God and others because of what Christ has done in us (Psalm 15; Micah 6:8; Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:31; Eph. 5:1; Col. 3:15-17; 1 Tim. 3:16; 4:8; 6:11; 2 Tim. 3:5; 2 Pet. 1:3, 6; 3 John 11; Rev 14:6).
- **Faith** is *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen* (Heb. 11:1). Christ is what we hope for; Christ is what is to be seen! Peter tells us that, *a faith as precious, Received a faith, a faith of equal standing...* Faith is the promise of God that gives us the hope and confidence so we can receive, act on, obey, and trust God's promises, because God is sovereign and trustworthy. Real faith is subjective to each person's experience, and is to be true and valuable. Each person grows at a different rate and depth. It also refers to the body of believers (as in Church) who share in a common belief and practice; there are no different castes or classes for those in Christ! The theme is that there is one faith through Christ, and all are on an equal playing field before Christ. There may be varying levels of growth and maturity, but all are equally accepted (John 20:29; Jude 3; 1 John 3:1-3). We can trust God for the future because we can see what He has done in the past—from creation, to testimonies, to His infallible Word (Rom. 10:17; Gal. 3:1-14; Heb. 2:4; 11: 1-6; 12:2; James 1:2-4; 2:14-26).
- **Virtue**, in some translations, is *Goodness*, and refers to moral excellence, the engagement of love, and doing the right thing. Virtue is the application of being good from both the conscious will to do what is right and from personal responsibility. It encompasses integrity, honesty, compassion, and endearment, quintessential qualities of biblical Character (that is right standards, strength, courage, modesty, and purity all done in excellence). We acquire Virtue by our faith, our obedience to Christ, being persistent in Him, and clothing ourselves in Him. This is what results when we truly repent; we represent the nobility that we have in Christ (Amos 5:15; Psalm 103:17; 131; Prov. 8:13; 25:22; Matthew 7:12;

19:16; Luke 6:27, 35; Rom. 12:17; 2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 5:8-9; Col. 3:12-17; Phil. 2:14-18; 4:8; 1 Timothy 4:12; 5:22; Tit. 1: 15; Heb. 10: 5-10; 1 Pet. 3:11; 2 Pet. 1:3-8; 2:9).

- **Perseverance** is having confidence in God so we trust Him in difficult situations and still see His grace and love. We exercise it when we continue in our state of grace so we live it out in our lives and walk with Christ to the end for our eternal reward! Perseverance occurs in our journey of faith, allowing it to be lived it out in our personal lives. We can do this by being encouraging with Christ-like temperament. Whatever we face and/or go through, our Lord is there and we are in His arms. When we realize this fact, we can persevere through anything because our Lord, King, and Creator of the universe is there to carry us through (2 Chron. 32:1-8; Esther 7; Luke 16:22-31; 18:9; Acts 19:8-10; 26:19-23; Rom. 15:14-16; Phil. 1:6; 12-14, 25; 2 Tim. 2:25; Hebrews 12:1-3).
- **Brotherly kindness**, sometimes translated as *affection*, means love for a brother or friend (in the Greek, *Philadelphia*). It is a call to treat others as family because we are all in God's family. This means to have kind affection toward one another, as in *be devoted*, to look out and look after each other, and to give preference to one another, because there are no inferior or superior people in the Kingdom of God, just those with different calls, abilities, and opportunities! This type of Kindness is the proof of authenticity that creates an environment of trust and encouragement, so that people will want to be with us, join our church, and belong as a Christian (Rom. 12:10; Heb. 13:1).
- **Love** is the turning of our backs to our self-concerns, and facing God and our neighbors. It will enable us to appreciate others in the Lord. Love desires to seek and apply what God has to say. When you have the wrong idea and definition of love, it will adversely impose on all areas of your life. Understanding what love is not is as important as understanding what love is. God's love must be our model for life. It must flow into us from Christ, and in return flow out from us to those around us (John 13:1; 15:13; 1 Cor. 13; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Thess. 4:9-10; 5:8-13; 1 John)!

In addition there is:

- **Humility**, which is how we are to come to the Lord and display His temperament as He walked the earth. This minimizes arrogance and removes pride. It is the understanding of our fallen nature and weaknesses that causes us to think we are better than we are, and that causes us to strive to lift ourselves above others and God. It is admitting that others, and most importantly God, are responsible for our achievements. Humbleness will enable us to be a teachable person who is willing to have a good attitude of submission and servanthood, a person who confesses sin and remembers how Christ served us! Humility is not self-hatred or having a "poor me" attitude (1 Kings 8:58; Psalm 25; Luke 22:27; Col. 1:18; Phil. 2:8; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:3-5).

- **Compassion** will allow us to feel the pain and plight of others, to see from their perspective and situation in life. It will enable us to convey a deep feeling of love and concern that moves us to meet their distresses, struggles, and needs. True Compassion is a result of the poured out life that has been devoted to God and attached to His interests. It will also make us more confident of our Lord and His working within and through us. This all flows from our understanding of who God is, and our obedience, trust in, and gratitude for what He has done for us. Our lives must be motivated by who we are in Christ, and nothing else (Job 29:13; Isa. 40:11; Mark 1:41; Luke 10:25-37; 19:4; Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:12-16; 1 Peter 3:8)!
- **Forgiveness**, we are called to forgive freely, as Christ has forgiven us. We must be willing to forgive as Christ has forgiven us. We must be willing to bear the cost, just as our LORD did. Forgiveness demands a substitution. So, how could we ever back away from forgiving each other? If we do, it is a bigger insult to our LORD than for the non-Christian to turn his or her back on His Grace—*because we know better*. Remember, knowledge brings responsibility. Forgiveness is absolutely crucial for any relationship to continue, and critical in resolving any conflict! Remember how much you have been forgiven; do not fail to show it to others! Remember, God does not treat us the way we tend to treat others (Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 43:25; 1 Corinthians 13:5; Colossians 3:12-14).

Plus sixty more: see our *character* channel.

We are called to *Put on* this, a call to take on the character of Jesus and put it on us, while we put off the vices that hinder us. Don't worry that we cannot do this on our own; He imparts to us the power and ability to do so through His work and the Spirit! It is something we do not force to come about; rather it happens naturally as we learn and grow in Christ, then His character envelopes us as we take on the new identity of a person not only saved by grace but empowered and shaped by Him. If we just live our lives with the attitude of how things affect "me" and not "others," then we are living "with" the devil, and not "with" God! It is essential as Christians to demonstrate His love in how we relate to both for God and then to others (Romans 13:11-14; Ephesians 4:1-6, 22-24; Philippians 2:1-6).

How is this done?

Simply put by Paul, we achieve this by allowing the Word of Christ and His presence to dwell in us, and learn His instruction, so the peace of Christ rules our hearts and minds, translating into actions. It is all about our spiritual growth impacting us so it impacts others positively and in love (Col. 1:15; 2:3; 3:1-11)!

Take a close look at each of the fruits listed. Which ones are you exhibiting well? Which ones do you lack? What are you going to do about the ones in which you are weak? We are called not to be *ineffective* or *unproductive*; this means we are being

called to be productive and useful in the Kingdom as well as the community. If not, we are in disobedience and ignoring of His love and gifts for us. Why would a Christian not want to be productive for the Kingdom (Phil. 4:8-9)?

(More in-depth descriptions and Bible study on each one on our *The Fruit of the Spirit* channel.)

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The Practice of our Fruit

Fruit of the Spirit Part II

The Fruit of the Spirit is the continual and indispensable application of God's work in us that spurs our growing, effectual, spiritual development. This, in turn, assembles the elements we need to further build and live out our faith so we can effectively and graciously relate to others around us. This is God's power-current at work in us—how His love comes into us and then flows out of us. It encompasses everything from the presentation of the Gospel by our lives, even without words, to how we shall live in faith, from doctrine to duty, because we should never separate our faith and thinking from our action. This means we live out the Gospel, Christ's extreme makeover and renovation power in our lives made real, and then being exhibited outward. This is not just talking about our Lord or doing a ministry or being in leadership or hanging out as a Christian; it is something far more important that empowers all of that. It is the love and grace in our lives first transforming us so we can be used in the lives of others. It comes without pretention or pride, rather in joy, manifesting the goodness and character of Christ so we are relevant, relatable, and contagious for God and Church. The cultivation of our Fruitful faith becomes the practical aspect of living and loving life and is the current God uses in us to show that the Gospel is real as it resides in us and resounds to those around us. We have been saved, not of any effort or reason on our part except by faith; so, now what do we do with it? We are to be transformed so we can take it to the streets of our lives in how we live to ourselves, others, and even our enemies. The Fruit of the Spirit is God working through us (Rom. 12).

The Essential Christian Life Requires the Fruit of the Spirit

Our Fruit shows us that the Christian life comes with a responsibility to take the knowledge we have gleaned from His Word, our faith, discipleship, prayer, and devotional life, and then applying it while His love is working in and through us! Then, we are to ask, "How then do I live? What can I do now, today, or this week to implement the instructions given to me with my relationship to Christ, to others, and to myself?" No matter where we are or what circumstances besiege us, scare us or excite us, from the drudgeries of life, to daunting places, and/or to the opportunities at hand, His Fruit must

direct us and lead the way. His Way paves the path; His Fruit lights our way giving us comfort, knowledge, hope, and life. Consider this: as Christians, our primary job is faith, the atonement of Christ exhibited in us! This is what we have in Christ: Love—His loving devotion to us, and our response of obedience to His love. We do this out of love from His love, not out of legalism or mere obligation, but rather from gratitude and devotion.

This means that we are *partakers of the divine nature*. We partake in Christ so we can live out our lives in Christ. We participate as *sons*, (and) *children of God* as we are conformed to the likeness of Christ. We are not made divine through either our efforts or His, or through purification, and we are not little gods. We have the image of God in us and we have the Holy Spirit, the Divine Nature living in us, guiding, leading, motivating, and fulfilling us. He gives us His actual presence as well as His precious promises. Knowing the promises of God will help us escape the evils of the world. This is a tremendous way to take hold of our trust in Him and grow our faith through our obedience. A Bible Promise book is a necessity (Gen. 3:5; John 1:12; Rom. 8:9-21, 29; 2 Pet. 1:9, 11).

The Fruit of the Spirit is also a description of who we are to be in our entirety. This is the basic, foundational character upon which the other characters rest. God's Spirit empowering and working in us summarizes the essence of character in general as applied to our entire lives as Christians. It encapsulates the work of God in us. This is what builds a life emulating God and building a church upon Him where people will want to go. We all have the ability to be good or be bad, to take what Christ has given us and use it, or ignore or even pervert it. This not just about our reputation and ambassadorship in Christ; it is how we are to serve and be if Christ has a hold on us and our church (2 Cor. 5:20)!

Being a servant of Christ means we surrender all of what we are until He becomes more and we become less (John 3:30; Gal. 2:20-21). We do this because what we gain is so much more; it is peace, serenity, confidence, hope, and, especially His Fruit that impact us as well as those around us. Think this is too hard? Consider Peter, who writes about the Fruit in 1 Peter 1. He is the example, who through a slow and arduous process, found this to be workable and doable and something at which he could even excel. He went from being the arrogant, headstrong, and reckless fisherman to calling himself a slave—a remarkable picture of Christ's imputing and impacting work that can also happen to us.

This Fruit in action comes from our submission to God, which produces love, kindness, gentleness... This happens when we are changed by what Christ has done in us. You have to ask yourself, "Am I doing this? If not, why not?" When we profess Christ as Lord or make a public testimony, we are declaring that Jesus Christ has a hold on our lives—from today through eternity—one that transcends human understanding. We are no longer of this world, but belong to Him as His child—saved and redeemed! This is the start of our personal relationship with Jesus Christ not just as Savior, but as LORD over all, over our desires, needs, and plans. This is imparted to us through our intimacy with Him (Psalm 15; 36:9). True intimacy with God is not found in our feelings,

works, entitlement, deeds, the reciting of creeds, or even by having the right theology in mind, which is also important. Rather, real, true intimacy is our deep affection and knowledge of Christ that is continually assembled by our heartfelt devotion and commitment, and practiced by our trust. This in turn, demonstrates our willingness by moving forward in our journey of faith.

The Fruit of the Spirit is God's Power in Us

There is a second aspect to receiving and applying His power of Fruit and Spirit into our lives. We have the responsibility to practice it. The sad part is that this is perhaps the most negated aspect of the faith journey for most Christians! We are not great at it at the start. Just like learning to drive or play a game, it takes time to master, no matter how talented we may be. We have to work at building our Fruit orchard by learning, absorbing, and then applying what we have learned. In using it, we grow and mature. The price is not too high since Christ paid for it. We have no excuse not to grow and serve Him! Never consider that it is too difficult or that you are not gifted or worthy enough, because the Spirit in you is able to do it (Psalm 87:7; Isaiah 40:29-31; John 14:13-14; 2 Cor. 9:8; Col. 3:23)!

We need to keep in mind the eternal inheritance we have in Him that we do not deserve, yet do receive by the grace of our Lord and Savior. Our salvation is something we can never obtain by our own efforts, power, wisdom, or time. It is purely and solely a gift that is given because Christ intercedes on our behalf. Jesus deals ever so mercifully and gently with us, a great attribute of His grace and one that we are called to extend to others too. Of course, the Fruit of the Spirit must be done with discernment and with proper boundaries. It is an example of the stewardship of our faith and what we have, which always comes from somewhere other than our own making; we just build upon and refine it. God is the Great Maker and Refiner. We give to Him and His representative as a show of our gratitude and devotion. It is all about His character that resounds through time and history to us today. His character is what ripples with such a strong effect; it is needed and timeless, and can be exhibited in us. The question is, *does it flow from you? Do you look for it in others and encourage them to let it flow too?* If you want a safe and content place to know and worship God or to raise a family in a hostile world, God's Word and the character from our Fruit of response is ever so needed and called for.

Christ and the Bible are greater than us. When we "get this," we can hand over our lives in utter surrender. We are called to study the Bible more seriously and thoroughly to be biblically informed, and to use it, not just as a reference and guide, but also for our inspiration and life principles. The Bible points us to the One with Power whom we are to know, receive, and worship. The Word of God is essential but it is not the "all in all;" the crucial, missing component is our trusting rest in Christ. At the same time, it is the Bible that gives us information about these Fruits, where we hold on to them, by our due diligence and trust, as a form of worship—to fuel our knowledge and principles. The Bible, by itself, gives us a picture of faith and Fruit, but it is not the object of faith or the perfection of Fruit; Christ is.

Walk in the Spirit

Fruit of the Spirit Part III

Do you know what it means to be led by the Spirit?

We are called to walk in the Spirit. This is not a Charismatic or a Pentecostal endeavor, nor is it some mystic exercise or short-cut to our receiving a “blessing.” This is the doorway to spiritual maturity, being spiritually minded and guided as a Christian and a leader. What we really need to know, what the Word is focused on, is becoming righteous and drawing closer to Christ so maturity and faithfulness will result. We are made for and called to walk close to God and in the Spirit, which is evident when we display the Fruit of the Spirit!

There is a radical difference between our flesh and His Spirit. Our fallen, sinful nature is indicative of the fall of our minds and will away from God, His call, and precepts. Our intention is to move away from Him; His intention is for us to draw nearer to Him. When we do, draw near, our body becomes a vessel of Christ’s living space. A call is given, to *escape the corruption of the world*. Our sinful nature creates the sinful desires that lure us with passion to do what is deceitful and evil. The decay of our standing in Him and of virtue will cause the decay of us and our culture. The question is, *whose lure are you biting into—Satan’s or God’s* (2 Pet. 1: 1-4; 2:14; 3:3)?

The fact is that as committed followers of Christ, we belong entirely to Christ. He purchased, restored, and renewed us and He empowers us (1 Cor. 6:19-20; 1 Pet. 1:18-19)! Thus, we need to make the commitment and determination to trust and obey Him and follow His precepts! We are called to partake of His divine nature. He gives us the power of His Fruit of the Spirit to do so, even to overcome temptations and evil. If we do not sidestep corruption and evil, we will become consumed with all that takes us away from Christ and His call to develop and mature our faith! Goodness cannot work when we are distracted away from Him. If we are not living the godly life, but rather are defending our positions from our pride, how can we lead others to Him?

How we are un-transformed: *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.* (Gal. 5:19-21) This indicates lives that are not rooted in Christ and the absence of practicing good thinking, which will create discord, stifle, and evil stemming from a lack of accountability or a basis upon which morality can be built.

There is a stern warning here for all of us! We have a responsibility to pursue our faith development that results in a good demonstration of modeling Christ (2 Cor. 5:20)! If we ignore our call to pursue our spiritual growth, abandoning the development of our virtue and character, we will face life without God's empowerment and benefits. Even when we have forsaken Him, He does not forsake us; nevertheless, because we did not take a hold of the benefits He gives, they will not be in our arsenal or developed enough to be of much use in dealing with life. Our shortsightedness and refusal to be prepared results from taking our eyes off Christ and placing them on our circumstances and stresses, thus making us empty and bankrupt to deal with those circumstances! Do not let this myopic thinking happen to you!

The Fruit of the Spirit are the result of a life transformed by Christ!

How we are transformed: *But the Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. (Gal 5:22-26)* God uses His Spirit and Word to transform us; it is what He does with what we have. He sends us His Spirit, we respond. True application comes out of a changed life and leads to a life transformed!

The Spirit's divine power is available and given to us. The knowledge of Christ increases our faith and power! This is also to counter *Gnostic* philosophy that states the soul and body are separate and we can do as we wish with our bodies as long as our hearts remain pure. Our hope is not in what we do; it is in what Christ has done for us! Thus, through the Fruit of the Spirit, *everything we need is granted to us*. We have no excuse not to grow in Him. All that is important and eternal has already been given to us. What is important is what grows our faith and our spiritual formation—the Holy Spirit, God's Word, other believers who are mature, and most importantly, Christ's work for us!

How can I get this going more? Read the entire chapter of Galatians, chapter 5, slowly and carefully, and observe what is said. Paul begins with what we are not to do and be, and then what will be produced, both good and bad, by our response to God's work in us. When we are walking in the Spirit, we produce good Fruit. When we are not, we produce bad Fruit. Can you guess that from our initial research into this, most pastors and churches do not produce the good set? This passage should shock us; if we take it seriously, we should be rebooted back to Christ! This is what the Church should be doing—good Fruit led by pastors and lay leaders who are instilled and infused with good Fruit. What seems to take place is the opposite or what Galatians tells us are the Fruits of the flesh, and the Bible clearly tells us that by doing these, we will NOT inherit the Kingdom of God!

“Does this mean I am not saved or going to heaven if I do not have Fruit coming from me?” you may ask. I can't tell; but if you love the Lord, you should naturally have some Fruit flowing, and as you grow, produce more. “Does it mean if I get drunk I will

not go to heaven? Or, if I struggle with pride, as it is the quintessential thing God hates the most?” (And you thought it was homosexuality; no, it is pride, look it up.) No! What it means is to have a mindset and a lifestyle that is in direct opposition in our will and behavior and in agreement with what God has said and called us to be. Our Fruit trees of faith wither and die because we ignore His Truth of the Word and Spirit and allow our flesh to take the place of the Fruit. If the person or leader is practicing sin and is unrepentant, then it would indicate he is in such rebellion that he cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, or has never been saved—churchgoer, or pastor! Hope is still there as long as breath is in them. At the same time, this is a battle we all have as fallen, sinful creatures, as sin is still in us. So, we will have setbacks and struggles; we will not be perfect, but we need to try. What will be the outcome? Will the flesh or the Spirit triumph? This is up to you and how you receive Christ and apply His character and teachings to your life and ministry!

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How is your “Fertility?”

Fruit of the Spirit Part IV

How can I grow in The Fruit of the Spirit?

Look over the first part of this series and read the descriptions of the Fruits, *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*, or any of the sixty-plus godly characteristics on the list that He calls us to emulate and put into our relationships. These are essential to growing a healthy and lasting relationship. You can examine the descriptions, look up the Scriptures, and then ask yourself these six questions:

1. Is this Fruit working in me?
2. How do I now exhibit this Fruit in my daily life?
3. How can I use this Fruit to develop a better willingness to respond to others—especially to the ones I love—with a sense of awe and fear of God, and respect for people?
4. What blocks this Fruit from working and being exhibited in me?
5. How can I make this Fruit function better, stronger, and faster, even in times of uncertainty and stress?

6. Think through the steps you would take to put this Fruit into action in a specific instance, or, to improve it. Consider the examples from the passages in God's Word.

And do not forget to be in prayer during all of this. Have someone you trust hold you accountable or get in a small group to learn and practice.

So, how is your “Fertility?”

That is, how is the Fruit of the Spirit growing in you? How *should* His Fruit be growing in and through you? Keep in mind that it means Christ comes through you in all things and times! Our faith will be tested—not to attack or cause us to fail—but to teach us to be more faithful, stronger, and better so we can be better to those around us. God wants us holy and pure in Him.

To make us pure, He needs to prune and refine us. This is not drudgery, but an opportunity to become more than we could ever be on our own. Our growth in Him comes from faith, spiritual maturity, and character development. These are things more precious than any gold, personal success, or financial portfolio. As we go through the tough stuff of life, we will grow and become stronger. We will worship Him more deeply and purely. We will honor Him more deeply, more relevantly, and touch the lives of others more deeply, too.

Life is not about our wants, needs, or comfort; it is about Christ working in us more powerfully and triumphantly. The key to turn on this engine of our spiritual formation is our willingness to pursue, endure, and grow. Allow the holiness of our Lord, His grace, His patience, understanding, faith, loyalty, goodness, and love to be exhibited in you—not by imitation, being fake but imitating Christ with gratitude and submission, *kept by His power* (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 1:27; Gal. 5:21-23; Eph. 5:1; Phil. 2:1; Heb. 6:12; 1 Pet. 1:5)!

Are you Active with the Fruit of the Spirit?

Why be active with the Fruit of the Spirit? Because Christ has made us right with God. So, how do we live that faith out in our daily lives? We can only begin to fathom all the precious privileges and wondrous blessings given to us by Christ. We have the responsibility to act upon them for the growth of our faith, character, and maturity. In addition, we are called to grow in Him! Why? Because when we receive a faith and salvation that we do not deserve or have not earned, we consequently respond with gratitude for what He has given, and we will desire even more. But to be so, we need Christ's empowerment. This will come from knowing Him, growing in Him, and then having that desire for more. This means we are being called on to be productive and useful in the Kingdom as well as the community. If not, we are in disobedience and ignoring His love and gifts for us. Why would a Christian not want to be productive for the Kingdom (Phil. 4:8-9)?

Christ has called us to a faith that is real, impacting, and growing. That faith is precious and genuine because it is freely given to us. We are to take what we are given and then add more to it. We obtain faith then add more faith to it. As a Christian, we have faith to begin with; we are called to multiply it. Just like the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30), we are expected to invest and develop further what is given to us, not for personal gain, but rather to glorify Christ and bring honor and growth to His Church. The key to faith's multiplication is answered here—our knowledge and devotion of Christ (2 Pet. 1: 1-4). The more we know and then subsequently apply to our lives, the more we grow; this is reciprocal. But knowledge can't be divorced or separated from action; you have to put it in your life. We are to apply what we learn so it transitions from our minds and hearts to our hands and feet. We have this in our mutual relationship in Christ, thus we can take what is given and make of it ever so much more. Cultivated faith in Him produces immeasurable, divine blessings!

Christ has given to us all we need in order to grow. We have His Spirit, His Word, His Fruit, and our faith community. This does not even include the countless resources we have in our modern age such as books, curriculums, the internet, and so forth. He has called us and empowered us, so what more could we expect? The clincher is that we have the responsibility to make it happen. Our faith is in our hands. He gives us the water, the fertilizer, the ground, the air, the "SON," and the seed. He even plants it! All we have to do is cultivate what He has given. What stands in the way of the cultivation of our faith? Usually, it is not recognizing or taking to heart His promises, which leaves us unsure of what we can do.

The true application of the Christian life comes only from the result of a life that is transformed!

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2

You may do good works without Christ, but they are out of a sense of obligation and guilt, and not out of a response to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who has covered our old, sinful nature by creating a willing and loving heart to model the Fruit and character of our Lord!

Is your Relationship with Christ Growing?

The Fruit of the Spirit is all about authentic faith developed from our growing relationship in and knowledge of Christ that is revealed to us as the foundation of our faith. We are being directly called to make every conceivable effort to put into practice our faith and the Fruit that is given to us and is at our disposal to use. Our faith is the benefit we have as Christians, just like working for a company and having a retirement account as well as various other benefits. Employers are not always obligated to do so,

but in order to make a healthier and more productive work environment, they do. The employees are responsible to sign up and use the benefits. If they do not, those benefits will not be available for use. Their use is not mandatory, but needed and necessary for life. The parallels are similar with what God has given us. He is not obligated to give to us out of His love and grace, but He does so because of that love and grace.

We are called to know Christ better and to practice moral excellence. But, before moral excellence can happen, our hearts and minds must be lined up with God; and before we can do this, we have to know Him. Character and Fruit are only exhibited when we are communing with Him—not when we are negating or neglecting Him. The more we know God, the more we know His call, and the more we will have the desire and ability to grow in and apply it. Then we grow more in character, as the knowing and practicing also helps us to be built up in Christ. But, beware when we are myopic in our outlook on life. Not seeing Christ and not applying Him in our lives will cause us to fail at what is important, which is virtue and character!

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Is there Fruit in your Church?

Fruit of the Spirit Part V

Does your church have *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* pouring from its leaders and most of its people, on your campus and into the streets where its people are? If not, something is terribly wrong!

Christianity is not just the proclamation of the Gospel; it is also the example of the Gospel!

This begs for a question: *why do so many Christians see their faith as “on hold” until when it may be needed, and/or are doing nothing or just what they can get away with?*

Is the *Fruit of the Spirit* in you and in your Church?

How many of us have ever ventured into a church that was filled with unkindness, where we were ignored or even mistreated and where the church seemed more like a thorn bush than a fruitful vine...a church filled with a bad atmosphere from the bad spiritual breaths of its people making smog instead of the sweet fragrance of God's presence and love? As a pastor, I have a tough battle to make sure my flock behaves so that Christ would be pleased. And of course, I need to set the tone. I can try my best to set an example so I am not a thorn bush, and I can teach; but I cannot make

them behave! I can model, teach, disciple, urge, and pray. But, real, authentic Christian love comes solely from a real, authentic Christian formation. This is caused from the Fruit of the Spirit growing in each of us. If someone is not growing in the Lord, he/she is not willing or able to treat others with love and respect, nor is he/she able to model and do and be as Christ exemplified and taught. Care, compassion, and a real affection for others will be moot, love will be stifled, and kindness absent; and no matter how good the campus, teaching, or mission are, all that will be noticed is an annoying noise. The church will be an irritating and frustrating club of stubborn prideful people, devoid of harmony and brotherly love—devoid of Christ! Do we really want that? If not, what are you willing to do about it?

The essential way to grow a church is to be faithful with our Fruit! No one wants to come to a club where the people are *angry, bitter, immoral, impure, corrupt, into idolatry and witchcraft, and full of hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness...*and so forth! These are the key words Paul talked about in Romans, chapter one. It is the same with a local church; who wants strife when care and friendship are called for and needed? People will come to a place where there is love and joy, where they are treated with kindness, cared for, allowed to work on themselves while being shown patience and the composure of Christ from the leaders. We need to know that we display Christ by our attitudes and actions. If we do not do this right from what Jesus modeled and taught, we will get our churches all skewed upside down and wrong. We will be the church of the thorn-bush, a fruit-stand devoid of fruit, a place of dysfunction instead of a church of Jesus Christ and His transforming power!

Remember: Christ did not give up on us when things went from bad to worse with our sin. His grace, forgiveness, and perseverance came to us anyway!

A Fruitless Church is a Big Problem!

One of the main problems I have seen in the churches I have served and consulted for or have researched is the lack of Fruit from its leaders and members. We have to see this as a travesty before our Holy God. It can come from the over-focus on the personality of a leader who is prideful or a preoccupation with a trend, giving no regard to the precepts of the Word, or the basic lack of kindness when you visit such a church. Some churches are good at one or two of the Fruits of the Holy Spirit to the exclusion of the rest of the Fruits. Maybe you will see big smiles from the pastor who is a good teacher, but sometimes impatient and cold—perhaps even smug. This can be from focusing on the Gifts of the Spirit while ignoring His call and Fruit of the Spirit. We have church leaders and pastors concerned about being deliberate and intentional, thinking that “my church is exclusively my ministry; this is all about me.” They are all about building a legacy to themselves and how they want to build their church to and for themselves, something which they rationalize away using statistics, pop psychology, and business trends while ignoring the Word.

How many people, in an average, good church, practice the Fruit of the Spirit in that church? Well, we do not know yet. The initial research is all over the map from a mere twenty percent 20% to a quantity of eighty percent (80%) of church leaders who deem themselves fruitful. In the mean time, those under their leadership show a small deviation; a measly eighteen percent (18%) to an over seventy percent (70%) see their leaders as bearers of fruit. How many practice it at home? How many practice it at work? This is the research we are seeking. When we know what we are doing with our faith and fruit and see what Christ calls us to do, perhaps we can improve our church's workplaces and our homes!

It seems, from our initial research (our partner the *Schaeffer Institute*) and experiences, that most Christians respond to their faith with a rear end firmly planted in a pew that goes nowhere near fruitful service or glory to Christ. They hold on to a will that does not allow conviction or change to their routine or life. Thus, church is just a club for comfort and not a “huddle” to strategize and put forward how to play the game of Christian life after receiving our orders from the Coach. We need to know that Christ calls us to change our minds like we change the oil in the car. Look what Romans twelve tells us to do: *“devote themselves to him; and avoiding conformity to the world.”* In other words, we are to be changed, fruitful people so we can be change agents to others. Not to be infected by the world, but to help it along toward His purpose. We cannot do that when we are poured out to our will and desires only and not to our Lord. Oh, that we can be: *“...conformed to his holy will”... “to think humbly”... “to exercise faithfully”... to mutual love, diligence, patience, hope, prayer, hospitality, compassion, and condescension “and becoming conduct towards all men”!* Our devotion to Christ must be rooted in the mind and then let the Fruit translate it to the feet and the rest of our bodies in between—the body of us as human beings and a body of believers in relation to all those around us, which is our duty (Rom. 12:9-13).

A lack of Fruit is what Christ was so concerned about with the leaders of His day (just read Matthew 23) and why He spoke so much about this and that the coming judgment for our actions and responsibility. We will be held accountable as followers and especially as leaders; thus, we have to know what we are called to do. It starts with knowing Christ and then learning how He wants us to operate. Saved? Yes! To say this another way, as the Book of James asks us, ***what good is our faith if we misuse it or do nothing with it?*** Galatians, chapter five, gives us a key template to the Christian life and how to do ministry. And guess what; the churches that are Fruitful—as in the out flowing of the Fruit of the Spirit—are the ones that grow more, not only in numbers, but in faith and things that matter to our Lord! Just look how we will be judged in the eternity to come; our reward will not depend on how well and how often we exercised our gifts, but how well we produced the crop of effectual Fruit. Yes, the gifts and jobs of ministry are important; but the Fruit is the essential essence of our call. This is what is fundamental and indispensable for a capable leader and for an effective church!

The Fruit of the Spirit helps us Emulate Virtue!

Fruit of the Spirit Part VI

The sad fact is that the average Christian does not make the Fruit of the Spirit a priority in his/her life; this should cause us intense concern. And, even worse off are our leaders! This is why I believe we have so many thorn-bush churches and few fruit-stand churches. I am not saying those who do not practice the Fruit are not saved, because it is not for me or anyone to judge salvation; nevertheless, we should be deeply disturbed by this, for we are known by our Fruit! And, if there is no effective Fruit displayed from a person who claims Christ as Lord, then that person is detached from the nutrients of the Vine (John 15)! If your church is not displaying *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*, the question becomes, "is Christ there?" The evidence says "no," or at the very least "knocking at the door trying to get in!"

We are also duty-bound to be diligent in taking and receiving His flow of the Spirit, not for our salvation, but to grow in life and ministry. These benefits are the reasons we are given this precious opportunity to have the Fruit of the Spirit. God's love working in us needs to be known and then applied to be effective and real to us and to those around us. If we know them and then do nothing with them, they are as useless as having health insurance but not using it when you get sick. The same is true with trying to apply a Fruit without understanding what it is and how it is to be used. We would be inflicted with an imitation or a skewed and perhaps even rotten fruit as His marvelous fruit would go unnoticed and unused. It is like never filling out the forms and starting the benefits. Not knowing God's precepts means we would not be able to apply them, because what we are applying is not of Him!

We have both privileges and responsibilities in our Lord. God has given us gifts, abilities, and promises that we are not to store when needed. When they are needed, they are for us to persistently use! Such benefits given will not only profit us in our intimate relationship to Christ, but also empower us to build much heartier relationships with others, too. So, do not be shortsighted concerning your faith and the opportunities Christ has and will still bring. If we do not have a desire to pursue the will of God, we have to ask ourselves *why?* and *what is in the way?* Most, if not all of the time, it is the desire of sin that blocks us. Sometimes we may not recognize sin and rather rationalize it away. This happens especially when our view of Christ and/or our involvement in discipleship is ignored or "dumbed down." We seek things that tickle our ears but that require no due diligence on our part. Our election is proven by our obedience and growth in Christ!

This is the willingness to live out the Christian life we claim we are living. It is the actual implementation of His precepts into our daily lives, because these precepts are better than anything we could have planned on our own. We must have a life that matches what we say we believe; faith is the quintessential tool to make this happen both individually and collectively with one another in a church. This is where we take

what we have learned and believe and put it into action in our relationships and opportunities. The practice of the Fruit of the Spirit means that our faith and our deeds do not operate independently of each other. To make this happen further, we must have a mind that is focused, to the best of our ability, on God's precepts and character. Instead of filling our mind with needless junk, let us fill it up with things that will help us grow in our faith. Instead of a romance novel or a cheap magazine, pick up a good book, a classic, a book to help you grow; read the ultimate Book, His Word, the Bible. If you are willing to grow closer to God, then fill your mind with things and ideas that are pleasing to Him (Psalm 34:4-6; Rom. 12:1-3; 1 Cor. 2:16; James 2:18; 1 Peter 2:1-2).

We are Called to Stretch and Grow beyond what we Think we can Do!

It grieves our Lord deeply when we reject Him or turn from Him and His ways. He is especially grieved when we seek the tantalizations the world has to offer and ignore His wonder and blessings. As our Lord showed us by example, we are to follow up by caring for His people—our brothers and sisters in the Lord. This is a call to *rescue*, like a lifeguard rescuing a person who is drowning. People all around us are drowning in a sea of lost hope; your church can be the instrument God uses to offer them the lifeline of hope. This purpose can be accomplished by our working production of Fruit, praying, and example with humility, sensitivity, persistence, and by going out of our way for them.

Ministry is not just the proclamation of the Gospel; it is the example of the Gospel!

This is what it means to be in Christ; He is lived out in the lives of believers as they show real compassion for individuals. If we are not doing this, we are not doing ministry. We are to not only care in word, but also in deeds; even if we have to confront someone, we are always to do it in love and within the parameters of the Fruit of the Spirit. Thus, when we see someone start to stray, we are to come along side him/her in love and help him/her back to His path. We are to show His love and our genuine concern by being willing and able to help out beyond our comfort zone and cultural considerations. Do not wait; we are called to care and to care *now!*

Are you Led by the Spirit?

Being led by the Spirit is not a Pentecostal or charismatic endeavor; it is not about speaking in tongues or some esoteric Baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is not a special anointing or a blessing or a gift we receive from God or an emissary of His, most of whom are, more often than not, false anyway. Rather, pure and true from God's Word, being led by the Spirit means we are empowered by Him and this is primarily evidenced by who and how we are. The Fruit of the Spirit is the quintessential template and means to recognize His lead, and that Christ has taken root in us and thus is alive and well in our congregation. Such a lead will greatly affect your relationships, family, work, school, church, and life in general; this is the real, effectual fruit that shows Christ's impact, plan, and power to others, especially to non-Christians. So; are you led by the Spirit or

led by your own means? If by the Spirit, how is this working in your church? How is Christ displayed and glorified?

We can master the entire Bible, go to seminary, read all of the great Christian books, and even be totally transformed by the Word; but, if nothing comes from the Spirit—God's work in us—it is empty and of no real value! Our faith must have a response to it. Yes we may be saved, but what good is it if we do not have gratitude or allow the continual, effectual work of the Spirit within us? To do nothing with our faith development means we are not being transformed and not being led or empowered by the Fruit of the Spirit. Do not let this happen to you or your church!

The Christian life can be a difficult journey! We live in a fallen world corrupted by sin. Consequently, all that we do is imperfect and a struggle. We make choices that affect the direction in which we proceed in life and in relationships. In so doing, we affect others around us in both positive and negative ways. Yet, when our efforts and motivations are centered upon being righteous, we will be doing as we are called to do, and even be blessed for it.

As Christ's disciples, we must be willing to be led by the truth of His Word and by our faith and trust in Him. Because faith is also in community and mutual, we each partake in Christ and need one another to grow further in our pilgrimage of Christian living. This is what your church needs to be about! In so doing, we share Christ and therefore proclaim Him to those who do not know Him. To be a good church, we are called to glorify Christ in all that we do! In this manner, as both a global Church and a local church, we must also demonstrate His love in how we relate to others. And know this: everything that is worthy and excellent requires more work, from painting a house to preaching the Word. This journey of difficulty should not discourage us because it will build us up to be much better, stronger, and of greater use to God as we put into practice what He puts in us (Phil. 2:12-13).

So, enjoy it! See it as an adventure from which to learn and grow. Our character will improve and enable us to overcome all obstacles and help others through them. Thus, we should make it a point to give Him our best for His glory because He first loved us, and we respond to His Grace with our gratitude. At the same time, we can take comfort in the fact that He will not give us anything we cannot handle (Phil 2:10-13; Heb. 2:10)! So, let us live with excellence, to our best for His glory!

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Fruitful Thinking

Fruit of the Spirit Part VII

Is your Thinking Right? Are your Behaviors are Right?

Good theology is our right thinking of God's precepts, including the knowledge of His Fruit. Our mind and thinking must be based on Christ and Scripture through which the Spirit guides us (2 Cor. 4:18; 1 John 2:17). If not, our culture and the pleasures of life will sweep us away from God's best for us. This is our Christian life and purpose! This is the boot camp and the army is our duty in application. Yet, it is the least thing considered by the average Christian's pursuit, especially those who never take ownership of their faith, who grew up in a church considering it as cultural and a duty rather than devotion and lifestyle. Thus, our churches become fruit-stands that have no fruit in them, just a shell of a building without His real substance, impact, and power penetrating. The danger is for the Christian to sit in a pew, learn all that he/she can, and take comfort in that knowledge, but never do anything with it. This creates the church that refuses to evangelize or reach others, or display Christ by their words and deeds. The Christian that refuses to share his/her faith usually is one who is not growing in that faith. Thus, faith and Fruit may be miserly trickled out on Sunday but no display or model of Christ is present on Monday. Be aware that you will be harshly judged; you are no better than the Pharisees! The proof test is *do you use people, or serve them?* Do you just gather information, or do you apply it (Hos.6:6; Mica. 6:6-8; Matt. 12 9-14; 23; James 1:21-27)?

In Romans 12: 1-2, we are called as church folks to passionately pursue God's will, and that is to think rightly of His precepts. By doing so, we can make our faith real so it impacts others around us. This is what a collection of Christians is called to and should do to build a healthy, well-balanced church that glorifies Christ. The simple way we can do this is to see our lives as extensions of God's grace and hands, so we are willing and able to be lined up to Him and be better used by Him. We are called to be a *living sacrifice*, which means we are to be living, growing, and performing Fruit agents of God. We are not alone in this essential matter. As Christians, we are transformed completely by the Spirit; this includes all we are and all that we are to do—our will, our plans, and our opportunities (2 Cor. 3:18). We cannot do this unless we give our selfish will and pride and past hurts over to Him (John 3:30; Gal. 2:20-21; Phil. 3:1-14)! The incentive for us to surrender to Christ is that His Way is better than ours! He gave us a gift we cannot fathom, let alone earn the gift of grace and eternal life, so why would we not seek to please our Living Loving Lord?

When we are growing in Christ, we will be displaying Christ—our “reasonable service” as church leaders! Then we will have real ripe and pleasing Fruit; God's will is for us to be willing and able to please and serve Him. This is accomplished when we are on guard so that the distractions of the sinful life will not entice, motivate, or divert us from Him and His plan for us! The call is simple: be willing to allow God to transform you rather than the world; simple? Yes, but it takes diligent effort and the trust we have in

Christ to succeed as a church and as individual people of faith! When we do this, our thinking, attitude, and mindset will change and then impact all that we do in life.

But what is in the Way of our Fruit Production?

When we become a Christian either by birth in a Christian family (to slowly understand Who and What Christ is and over time make a commitment to Him) or through evangelism as an adult (a quick response when ones realizes their sin and need for grace and then commits to Christ), a time must come when the reality of who we are in Christ hits home in power and conviction. The black, dirty slime of our minds has to completely change to the new, golden anointing oil of His Fruit, love, and precepts. This will transform us into practical applications of His will in His church. But, our faith just does not come about on its own; something wondrous must take place within us to transform us so we can trust. This is what the Holy Spirit is doing in our Fruit of the Spirit production and cultivation. In other words, we must become the people of God in order to be capable and willing to do the work of God.

Keep in mind this Fruit is mutual; it takes the power of the Holy Spirit to keep us motivated, especially in the leadership of the church and the common places of personal life! This is how the Christian life is to be practical and outgoing—not sedentary and inclusive. Since God saved us, we in turn are compelled to show our response, to work in Christ's behalf, to be His agents, powered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel message, even in our own church. This will allow us to have discipline and restraint with obedience to God and others. We must refuse to let distractions derail or remove us from His will and plan so we will not be held back with what Christ called us to do (Prov. 16:32; 25:28; Rom 13:12-14; 1 Cor. 6:12; 9:25-27; Col. 3:16; 1Thess. 5: 22; Titus 2:12; Heb. 12:2; 2 Pet. 1:5-7).

This is why we at *ITW* and *FASICLD* are embarking on this new research project to see if our churches are truly displaying Christ or building temples unto themselves. Are we fruitful vines or thorn-bushes? This is entitled, *The Fruit of the Spirit as a Biblical Mandate versus Actual Practice in American Churches*. The initial results are not good; in fact, they are an abysmal testimony to failure resulting from not taking our lead from God, but seeking to be led from ourselves. Thus, in our wake is left a diseased-ridden and dysfunctional church; if we do not turn around, we will fail beyond measure.

Questions to ponder:

1. We are called to stretch and grow beyond what we think we can do! Remember, our Lord offers His encouragement for all those who are in Him to grow in Him!
2. What does it take for you to have a greater desire and ability to grow, practice, and apply your faith?
3. What does it mean to you to make every conceivable effort to put into practice your faith and fruit? How is this necessary for your life?

4. What have you received from Christ that drives your life? What is in the way? What are you going to do about it?

Remember, Christ is our Empowerment and our Example!

All churches will have fighting and squabbling. We are all in some process of sanctification and growth and we are not perfect—or called to be so. The question is, *are we on the right road that delivers the fruit or are we just stationed at the fruit-stand and not restocking it?* A prime purpose of the Church supposedly is to show and give out the Fruit, but many of us find ourselves empty. Are we making the effort to pick out the rotten fruit and throw it away? If you want to be successful in life, church, and ministry, you need to get this point: we are to be *fruit makers*. The primary purpose of doing church is not to just please ourselves, but to glorify and serve our Living God. Our lives as Christians are about how we live out His work and honor our Lord; we can best do this by applying our faith and growth in Him to display and give out this Fruit in our church relationships.

Having trouble? Take heart! Christ is the One who changes us and forms our Fruit. All we do is affectionately and in gratitude respond by faith and commit to His precepts. This requires our continual commitment to prevent our bad behaviors or body language from discouraging others from Christ and His Church.

Remember, *Christianity is not just the proclamation of the Gospel; it is also the example of the Gospel!* The action from your faith will reflect our Lord and either build or destroy your church! Consider this; the fruits and character that we have been given freely cost dearly; they are not cheap. Jesus Christ bought them and then brought them for and to us, for our betterment and to His glory. We must not take for granted what cost Him so much!

Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Proverbs 3:3

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The Desires of the Flesh and What They Do!

Fruit of the Spirit, Part VIII

Galatians 5: 16-21

Just before the great passage in Galatians that expounds the *Fruit of the Spirit* comes a warning and a list of the opposites of the good Fruit, the destroyers of churches, relationships, and self!

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:16-21, NIV).

This all comes down to our willingness to either live a life that is led by the Spirit or one that is led by our *flesh*, that of our pride and will. The flesh, as stated in the Bible, means our *finiteness* as in our finite or limited ability to comprehend and apply morality, which formulates our moral weakness. This includes our receptiveness and propensity to sin, our inability to see our own situation and respond in kind as God would have us do. One of the main points of the Gospel is that we are given the Holy Spirit to shore up our flesh, so we can be energized by God to live and work His way. Therefore, we have God's presence residing in us so we can overcome our weaknesses and be fruitful. We now have the ability to be moral partakers and representatives of Christ, and to practice the Fruit of the Spirit. The problem is that we still tend to not do this; we are always leaning to sin, even as Christians and church leaders (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 6:13; 15:50; Eph. 5:5).

God has given us two paths for life; one is good, the other bad. Two paths to follow, one that leads to joy and contentment and one that leads to destruction and chaos. He guides us to take the high road of His Fruitful Way so our journey in life will be good. However, He does not force us, so the other way is there, the path of the sinful nature, the rotten fruit. These result from our unchecked passions that only see what we want to see, that blind us from God's lighted path (Isa. 27:6; Hos. 10:1; 14:8).

The Call to Reflect God's Character

These Galatian Christians, like many of us today, were in *conflict with each other*. The KJV tells us they were *biting and devouring each other*. How terrible a thing it is when our Lord's children forget the magnitude of forgiveness we have received and seek to cause strife, division, and problems in His House. We forget the grace and allow sin to take a foothold in us that causes cancer to His Body! That is what these rotten fruits do; they cause tumors and cancer in the Body of Christ. We then operate as agents of evil, working for Satan, when we do the opposite of His call and plan. The Galatians got that way because of false teachers and people being lazy and not growing in the Word and faith just like we can become ill with physical cancer when we do not

take care of our bodies with proper nutrition and exercise. What we need to do is surgically remove the cancer, as in remove the diseased characters both from ourselves personally and from our church collectively. The scalpel of love and forgiveness, prayer and unity will create the healing we all need along with the medicine of His Love penetrating us so we can then spill it out upon others too. The base of operation for any good church is the Lordship of Christ, the platform is His glory, and the *Fruit of the Spirit* He gives us helps make this happen. Conversely, the sinful fruits will cause the opposite (Matt. 22:39; Luke 10:25-28; Rom. 13:8-10).

God has given us the empowerment to live out our Christian lives for Him victoriously and with excellence! He feeds us the spiritual food, pays our spiritual debt, and gives us knowledge and the assets to be godly and good. If we truly trust in Christ—not just as Savior but also as LORD—we are given the power and ability to live a life of fullness with distinction of character and supernatural spiritual maturity so He is glorified by our lives and living testimony. He gives us the resources. They are here for us, and are at our disposal. We are not alone or cut off from what we need! But, there is a catch. We have to go for it; we have to appropriate His gifts and opportunities into our lives, as in find and engage them. We take firm hold of our faith (make our election sure) when we trust and then obey what He has for us. If we do not, we live a life of waste and even sin, missing out what is soooo good and precious for us. Why would anyone forsake His love and gifts (Deut. 31:6; Phil. 2:13; 3:13-14; 4:13; Gal. 3:14; 4:6; 5:5)?

What do the Rotten Fruits do?

This all starts with what the Bible calls our *sinful nature*, which refers to our heredity of sin—the universal, wicked sin-character of humanity, otherwise known as *original sin*. We placed ourselves under sin, and anyone who has ever lived was, and is under this curse. Sin deceives, the law reveals truth, and Christ brings us hope. Sin is the great deceiver (Gen 3:13; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:4). This is the root cause of relationship and church breakdown. The list in this passage was possibly of the specific sins this church was having trouble with. The second set was possibly less of a problem, less obvious, or seen in their daily lives but not in church: *anger, rage, malice, blasphemy/slander, filthy language, and lies*. These bad characters create the dishonest treachery that embodies our conduct and conversations so we take enjoyment from the cruel and nasty actions they do to others. They seek to destroy what is good and what would last, from buildings, to people, even God Himself if they were able (Rom. 3:13).

God is telling us sin should be obvious to us; we should already know how destructive it is because others have done it against us. This is the callous disregard for Christ and His outpouring of love to us, so we desire to hurt others without any reason other than the pleasure of doing evil to others and causing their sufferings in the worst sense. People tend to like extremes, and to live as they please, but they cannot ignore the law. The law brings out the worst in us, while the love of Christ brings out the best (Lev. 18:5; Deut. 30:15-19). This creates the sinful desires that lure us with passion to what is deceitful and evil. The decay of our understanding of our separation from God

the Father, and even, as a Christian, our standing in Christ and virtue will cause the decay of our culture and ourselves. This means we are controlled by our desires of sin and rebellion, and have careless disregard of truth—or of consequences! It is our natural, sinful nature to desire what is wrong and to destroy (Gen. 9:6; Rom. 5:12-21; 7:1-6; James 3:9; 2 Pet. 2:14; 3:3).

Questions to ponder:

1. Why would a Christian who is saved by grace desire what is contrary to the Holy Spirit and God's Word?
2. How are the *Fruits of the Spirit* and the *desires of the flesh* in conflict with each other?
3. What does it mean to you to gratify the desires of your sinful nature? How have you done this? What were the results? What can you do to stop it?
4. What are you going to do to receive and apply what God has given you?

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The Works of the Flesh!

Fruit of the Spirit, Part IX

Galatians 5: 16-21

Here is a list of the vices of sin that abuse others and us and should not have a hold on us. They cause us to hurt and in turn, hurt others. These are unjust and all they do is bring us unpleasantness and bitterness. When this happens, we must seek to break the bonds that destroy others and us. Our beliefs must affect our behaviors; our language must affect and reflect our faith. If not, our faith and thinking are skewed or even absent (Eph. 4:31; James 1:19-20; 3:9-10).

- *Sexual immorality.* Our word “pornography” comes from the Greek word “porneia.” This is any kind of sexual function outside of a husband and wife. This includes *lust*, which is the evil desire that traps us and brings down others who are around us—the very opposite of God's call for us. The world sees this as “un-blamable,” an obsession to be freely and universally allowed and practiced. Today, we make excuses saying it is genetics; creative excuses were fathomed in the ancient world too. (“I was made that way.”) I guess the genetics excuse is nothing new! This is the violation of the seventh commandment.

- *Impurity* means moral uncleanness, as to be callous and unconcerned with truth or the true benefit of self and others. The Christian life is also about being responsible! Our human tendency is to persuade others to agree with our views. This leads to corruption, and all that is evil. God's purpose is to get us in line with His views, which are pure. Yet, so many Christians spend their time as pursuers of argumentation and not pursuers of holiness (Eph. 5:3-4)!
- *Debauchery* means open display of public sin, like being shameless; this is unrestrained indulgence, seeking sinful, physical gratification, or giving in to one's desires. This leads to being merciless and unscrupulous in one's dealings with others and causes us to injure others out of spite, meanness, or revenge.
- *Idolatry and witchcraft*, meaning worshiping things that are not God, because we cannot serve two masters. When our attention is divided, we cannot be attentive to either one. We may not bow to physical idols today, but we may have what is worse, the focus on possessions and power. They become our idols and we worship them (1 John 5:21). Our identity, and personification of who we are becomes branded by what we have, and not who we are in Christ. When this happens, all of our Christian life will be affected. Those around us will get the wrong impression of Christ as He is reflected in a skewed way (Rev. 9:21; 18:23).
- *Hatred*. Here, it is extreme dislike that leads to antagonism towards other groups in the church because of race or wealth or position or anything. This causes the destruction of current and paternal quality relationships; it kills, causing wars and revulsion of church and society. Being hateful will put an end to our effectiveness in being a reflection of Christ's character and call. This is a call to be in control of our temper as the steel containment vessel for the sinful nature we all have. The Holy Spirit will restrain us but only in the parameters of our will to control it (Rom. 8:11; 2 Thess. 2:6; 1 John 4:4). Remember, temper is a valuable commodity that we are called to cultivate and care for; so, do not lose it!
- *Discord*, meaning unjust conflict, injustice, quarreling, disorder, and chaos from a spirit of disunity rooted in pride. This blocks harmony and forgiveness among us because of our active conflict creating factions and hurt. This is also how we use words for vainglory, to deliberately slander, malign, and not to seek the truth.
- *Jealousy* is being envious and or distrusting toward others because we are being self centered and not focused upon Christ. We become hostile toward others, intolerant, inciting rivalry and unfaithfulness. We are also tempted to compare ourselves with others and often, that leads to our putting others down. It is also envy, the thought that leads to the action and the desire to take what is not ours from others (the 10th commandment!). Be aware that jealousy, un-forgiveness, and envy will incite your anger. Expect it, and have a plan to handle it (Proverbs 3:31; 6:32 - 35; 23:17; 27:4).

- *Fits of rage and anger, uncontrolled temper, malice, slander, and filthy language* are the vices of sin that abuse others and us and should not have a hold on us. These are unjust and all they do is bring out our unpleasantness and bitterness. When this happens, we must seek to break the bonds that destroy others and us. Our beliefs must affect our behaviors; our language must affect and reflect our faith. If not, our faith and thinking are skewed or even absent (Rom. 13:13; Eph. 4:31; James 1:19-20; 3:9-10). God is demanding us to control our anger. Why? Because it incites violence, it destroys relationships and community, and it does not solve problems. It closes off our minds and hearts from God and others, and keeps us from seeing and understanding God and His instruction (Prov. 14:29, 15:18; 16:32; 29:11; 22; Eccles. 7:9; Matt. 18:15-17; 21:12-13; Rom. 1:18; Eph. 4:25-27).
- *Selfish ambition* comes from our pride and attitude that we are better than another. This signifies not just taking advantage of a situation, but mowing others down in a bad way or bad motive for evil's sake. This means we are self-focused by our own hearts and minds, and not God's, so there is no room for anything else, such as "good." This mentality then overflows to everyone else like peer pressure, dares, thinking solely of what's good for "me," extreme excess and personal pleasures, and how to infect others. It can be from going too far in bargaining at a market to having more than what is just in any dealings with others. This is common in people from rich to poor, taking advantage, not seeking to get a good deal. Taken too far, it hurts and takes advantage of the weaker, less fortunate person (Phil. 2:3).
- *Dissensions*, is quarreling to the point that we are in rebellion toward God, even if we are just rebelling against His other children because we harbor hurts and refuse to forgive and thus line up for war instead. This is because we focus on what we want and not what God wants or what is best for our families and church. If we are prideful or have personal agendas contrary to God's, we will fall short of growing in Him and at leading His church. We will not practice the leader love to the people He brings us to love and care for and thus will inspire them into rebellion and apostasy (1 Sam. 15: 23).
- *Factions* show us that we can become so consumed with arrogance, insolence, haughtiness, and regarding others with contempt, as if they were unworthy of any contact with us because we feel we are better than anyone else that we create division in our homes and in our churches.
- *Envy* is the desire to have what others have, their gifts or positions or possessions, and seek to manipulate or put them down. Paul called an envious person an idolater. He said to put to death *covetousness*, which is idolatry (Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5).
- *Drunkenness* refers not just to the abuse of alcohol or any bad substance, but also to the loss of perspective that God is Sovereign, and Lord. This causes greed and self-interest to become our "lord." Is our purpose in life governed with godly goals and direction, or with darkness? This question will determine how we respond to this passage and to life! What kind of light do you let in and let out?

- *Orgies* refer to any great excess, not just sex and multiple partners, but also to over-eating and Bulimia, or power. This was considered common practice to the Greeks; they were excessive in everything that was bad. They used the rationale that they were pleasing their gods, yet it ended their civilization and led to the Dark Ages!

This list of vices also tells us that God loves holiness and love, as both produce justice, and He hates sin and any form of discord or strife. From this, we can learn that without love being received and expressed in holiness, there can be no justice or hope for the righteous and faithful, even in a church.

Questions to ponder:

The *Fruit of the Spirit* is essential to growing a healthy and lasting relationship with God and others as well to grow your church. These bad fruits of the flesh do the opposite! You can examine these descriptions of the *rotten fruits*, look up the Scriptures, and then ask yourself these six questions:

1. Is this Bad Fruit working in me?
2. How do I exhibit this sin in my daily life?
3. How does this Bad Fruit affect the way I respond to others—especially to the ones I love?
4. What triggers this Bad Fruit to be exhibited in me?
5. How can I make this Bad Fruit go away, even in times of uncertainty and stress?
6. Think through the steps you would take to put this Bad Fruit out of your life and relationships? Consider the examples from the passages in God's Word.

And do not forget to be in prayer during all of this. Have someone you trust hold you accountable or get in a small group to learn and practice.

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Walk in the Spirit

Fruit of the Spirit, Part X

Galatians 5: 16-21

To *walk in the Spirit*, we are called to *not gratify the desires* or as Paul puts it elsewhere, *rid yourselves... put off...put on*. This is the language of putting on armor for battle and then taking it off when the battle is over. As Christians, our battles are not over until we are called to our eternal home. The image is to put off sin and embrace righteousness, as we are to be clothed in the Spirit, not in the world or in our desires. Also, this is a baptismal image as it was common practice to disrobe for the baptism and then put on new garments afterward if available. This is accomplished by focusing on Christ, right thinking, and faith (Mark 1:5; Acts 7:58; Rom. 13:12-14; Eph. 4:24-25; 1 Pet. 2:1)!

If we are prideful or have personal agendas contrary to God's, we will fail at our faith development and leading His church; rather than inspiring and leading His people, we cause hurt and dysfunction. Jesus Christ wants us to love and care, not to be in rebellion and apostasy. When we are gentle, as in kindness, this leads to care and compassion because we are concerned about the same things our Lord is. He calls us to be nurturing to others as He is with us. When we fight against one another, especially in the church, it is hurtful and even pathetic in God's eyes (Gen. 4:8; Duet. 25:17-19; Joshua 7; Matt. 21: 1-17; Luke 9:54; Rom. 13:13; 2 Cor. 12:21; Eph. 4:19).

There is hope and assurance when our trust is in Christ and His righteousness. He is our hope, even when the very foundations of the universe are collapsing around and under us. When our hope is in Christ, nothing can shake us (Luke 12:32-34; 1 Cor. 7:29-31; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Heb. 12:25-29; Rev. 6:16). Remember this very important point: sin and wrong desires, factions, and immorality bring us only "darkness." Darkness refers to having no peace, contentment, or happiness; chasing evils and pleasure, even our wants, only leave us destitute of what is really important. This can be in a family, in a nation, in the world, and even in the Church. Thus, a defiant heart will bring pain, chaos, strife, disillusionment, dysfunction, discouragement, distress, and grief. So, who wants that? Remember: He will equip us with what He requires for us to live a triumphant, purpose-filled life (Isa. 57:15-21; 59:1-21; 59:15-18; 65:1-15)!

There is no reason or necessary function for an authentic Christian to be drawn to sexual sin, greed, rage, dirty language, gossip, slander, malicious behaviors, or idolatry ruling our hearts and minds. Such things cause us to hurt each other and ourselves and then we seek other things to be our god and direction in life. We may not be able to remove sin completely, but we can move away from sin and toward our Lord. We can throw off our wrong desires, and live a life that is real, impacting, and triumphant! Do not allow your life to be hidden or ineffectual. You are so much better than the world says you are or people at school or work say you are; you have power from on High! You were dead; now you are alive in Him. What more can you possibly need or want? Christ is all that matters and He is living, working, and guiding you as a Christian!

We are to arm ourselves as soldiers, training and preparing for battle. Our battle is not with one another; rather, it is with sin! We are to be trained and are to be prepared

with Christ's attitude, outlook, knowledge, and experience. We are to prepare for injustice and suffering!

Which Gate Will it Be?

We are given a choice where to live out our faith and life—either with reason and the Fruit of the Spirit and love, or with hate and discord. We can either give the evidence of our great and loving God to others even without opening our mouths, or we can give the reasons and excuses others use for not going to church. As Jesus puts it, *what gate will it be?* We live in an age where all ways and religions are accepted as equally valid and good. We are told that we are narrow minded and bigoted if we suggest anything else. However, political correctness aside, there is only One Way, and it is both the hardest way and the easiest. Hard, because it cost our Lord so much; hard, because it requires us to surrender our will; hard, because it is so easy, we think we do not need it. Jesus is the One and only Way, the gate that is narrow, the Way that is difficult, and to say otherwise neutralizes the Majesty and holiness of Jesus, His teaching, and cheapens His Gospel.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:13-20 that even though the Way is simple in concept as is displaying Fruit of the Spirit, people, since the early Apostles and Judaizers (Jews who kept the Law, especially circumcision, while believing in Jesus), tried to add extra burdens on the Gospel of Grace. From circumcision to the scores of false teachers, Paul and Barnabas were plagued with this until Peter and Paul, through the Holy Spirit, set them straight. Today, it is no different. We still need to be “set straight” because of so much false teaching as well as presumptions, pride, grandstanding, apathy, and the lack of Fruit in the church. Churches often add in what is not there, and lead people far away from the simple, yet profound teachings of our Lord. Leaders tell us to carry what we do not need, or cut essential aspects from the gospel, as if it were a buffet, to act in pride and never teach or model what Christ demanded (Matt. 7:13-20; Acts 10-15; Gal. 5; 2 Pet. 1).

Added to this in our world today, we have so many false religions, cults, lifestyles, and ways of living, we can become overwhelmed and confused. The price for choosing the wrong or big gate is the ultimate cost of eternal consequences and despair. Do not cheat yourself and exchange what seems easy and fun for ultimate loneliness and desolation. Don't exchange what you want to do in the church for what God has called you to do—and most importantly, be.

Christ tells us that *difficult* is the Christian way. The Christian life can be a difficult journey! We live in a fallen world corrupted by sin. Consequently, all we do is imperfect, and a struggle. We will make choices that affect the direction in which we proceed in life and in relationships. In so doing, we affect others around us in both positive and negative ways. Yet, when our efforts and motivations are centered upon being righteous, we will be doing as we are called to do, and even be blessed for it. Jesus tells us what we need to know and prepare for. To teach that it is easy is true on the surface; however, it minimizes who and what Christ did and the price He paid (Acts 14:21-22). It

also minimizes the realization of how much you have been forgiven, and how much sin corrupts and destroys. We will go through difficulties and sufferings, but these cannot distract us; rather, we need to see the hope and glory that is to come. The aspects I learned to help the Fruit flow are this: do not focus on your situation, but on Christ. Good Fruit comes from being obedient to God in order to receive His blessings. Now, it is more of a mirror to our character, to who we are, or can be in Christ. Which path will you follow?

As Christ's disciples, we must be willing to be led by the truth of His Word and by our faith and trust in Him. Everything that is worthy and excellent requires more work, from painting a house to preaching the Word. This journey of difficulty should not discourage us because it will build us up to be much better, stronger, and of better use to God as we put into practice what He puts in us (Phil. 2:12-13).

This gate, in context, also applies to how deep and true we will be as a Christ follower. This means we have to realize we are responsible for our welfare, the choices we make, and the consequences from such choices. God will get us through them even when we mess up; this is His love and grace for us. But, why get ourselves in a bad situation and have to face repercussions from our actions (Rom. 6:1; Col. 3:1-11)?

So, enjoy making good fruit! See it as an adventure from which to learn and grow. Our character will improve and enable us to overcome all obstacles and help others through them. Thus, we should make it a point to give Him our best for His glory because He first loved us, and we respond to His Grace with our gratitude. At the same time, we can take comfort in the fact that He will not give us anything we cannot handle (Phil 2:10-13; Heb. 2:10)! So, let us live with excellence, to our best for His glory!

Questions to ponder:

1. What does it mean to overcome evil for good?
2. How and when will you grasp God's empowerment to live out your Christian life for Him?
3. What are "*Heavenly Qualities*" to you? What can you do to further develop them?
4. What can you do to be committed to God's Good Fruit and not your own Bad fruit?

The Lust of the Flesh

Fruit of the Spirit, Part XI

Galatians 5: 16-21

What Happens when we Exercise our Rotten Fruit?

In Romans 12: 14-21, we are told how to treat others around us. The theme of the Sermon on the Mount is clearly echoed here in this passage. The call is to serve others as Christ has served us, and to treat others as Christ has treated us. This means the carrying out of love, grace, and understanding in all of our associations and then reacting as Christ called, not with our emotions. The attitude is not to judge, overreact, bow to our emotions, or to let other's malevolence get the best of us; rather, we are to allow the Spirit to flow in to us and out from us.

We also need to understand that if we follow Christ, we will gain enemies who will want to destroy us. When you earnestly serve the Lord, people will rise up against you! The exhortation given to us is not to overreact, rather seek kind solutions and pray for those who seek to harm us (Matt.5:10-12; Luke 6:28; 2 Tim. 3:12). Our temper must be under control, which means having a good emotional response, not making "wise cracks" or demeaning someone because they first demeaned or humiliated us. We are to see past the reaction of others and concentrate on how we act in response! We do this by referring our mindsets to God's justice and not our own, by allowing the covenantal work of God (Deut. 27:11-30:20) and not superimposing ours (this does not refer to breaking civil laws or causing abuse; such things involve the civil authorities!).

Other Christians will also come against us and attack. We must know that other Christians who are "apostate," (not living according to the Word, but according to their own desires, such as gossipers, and hypocrites) who are refusing to serve in their call will come and attack us the hardest when we honestly and faithfully serve the Lord! They do this because they are out of God's will, in order to make themselves feel good and satisfied, and to elevate themselves; they must bring godly Christians down. The Pharisees were the equivalent of apostate Christians in Jesus' time.

We know that Satan will attack us; we should expect it! Christians will also attack like the TV show, "when animals attack" (I could not resist this pun!) This is the one thing we do not anticipate happening, but it does. It is one of the sorriest and most pathetic things under the sun. It is also one of the most hurtful things on par with having a family member attack us. These attacks are rarely physical in nature, although I have observed many a fistfight in a church. The attacks are usually in the form of gossip, slander, legalism, and such. As many child psychologists suggest, verbal abuse is tougher to overcome than physical abuse. Many Christians fail to realize that our intrinsic value comes from Christ, not from what others say or do, so look to Him and all else will fall into place! However, we forget and we fight! So, churches fight and people leave, never to venture into another church again! Thus, we are to look at Christ as our

Lord and example and not what other Christians seem to do to us. Our faith is in Christ, not in how we are treated in Church. However, we must always strive to do our best at treating others—even at church—with excellence in the way of the Fruit of the Spirit! If we can't do it at our "home," how can we do it in our personal homes and community?

Truth will divide, but it will also unite, so we have to find a way to retune our thinking to these challenging precepts of Scripture. If we have the opportunity to turn an enemy into a friend, then we must do whatever it takes to make it so. We do this by doing good to those who seek to do us harm! You can produce fruit to either nourish and impact others or hurt them (Rom. 1:28-31).

Our response to Satan is found in Eph. 6 and 1 Pet 5:8. Our response to our enemy, both secular and the apostate Christian, is to love them. (We are not to love Satan!) If you are in a role of hatred, the thing that hurts the most is someone coming to you in love! Conviction is very painful when we do not yield. We can identify with others with understating, compassion, empathy, and sympathy. We are to express the unity of Christ, so be involved with God's love to others (Luke 6:31)! We can *live in harmony*, meaning emptying ourselves of pride to allow the work of sanctification that brings humility and love, by respecting and sharing the same love and thoughts—togetherness (Phil. 2:1-8). It is about positioning ourselves in Christ, not in the ways of the world; being harmonious but not filled with self-conceit!

We can't allow our hurts to escalate and hurt others. Our revenge is to be loving, for this has the greatest sting! And, it has the greatest positive effect. When we turn an someone we do not like into someone we can have a positive relationship with a friend, we have won an incredible battle and prevented future war. We are to turn strife into an incredible blessing! Know this: God will allow your enemies to teach you, as an enemy may know you better than you know yourself. Thus, learn from their attacks. Learn, and grow in Christ.

Have you been hurt? Then, let it go and let God be the judge! He is God and knows the true motivation and circumstances of people, an attribute to which we do not have access. Thus, He will judge with the right amount of vengeance. Our vengeance is insignificant, unnecessary, and unlawful before God! Let God be God. In fact, we are called to go out of our way to associate with others who are different, even various races and classes. Real self worth and value is determined by who we are in Christ, not who we are in the world. Career, money, and power have their role, but when they become our identity, they are illusions made to convince us we are relevant and important; they are no comparison to what we have in Christ! How and what we think determines how we live and treat others (Prov. 3:7)!

We are called to do a difficult thing, to seek Christ and not our pride or the overreaction of our emotions. This is completely opposed to our fallen human thinking and culture, which is to pay back evil for evil. Yet, this is our first thought when something bad happens. It was the typical American thinking and desire to destroy Afghanistan after 9/11, but clear thinking prevailed—that there are millions of people

who were innocent and victims of the same rulers and terrorists who attacked us. We must see that it is God's position and authority to exercise revenge; it is our role to seek peace and harmony, while at the same time to be discerning. Thus, it is good character to seek why it happened, find out the real problems, and then act, just as our government did. God even calls us to bless people who hate us! So, we have to find a way to retune our thinking to follow these challenging precepts of Scripture.

Christ has given to us all we need in order to grow!

Questions to ponder:

1. What is your first thought when something bad happens?
2. If you follow Christ, you will gain enemies who want to destroy you. So, have you personally experienced this?
3. How did peoples attack on you affect your faith? Did it build you stronger or cause you to flee?
4. Have you been hurt? How can you, let it go, forgive and let God be the judge?
5. What do you have to remove from yourself to allow God to be in control?

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Is there Fruit in your Church?

Fruit of the Spirit, Part XII

Does your church have *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* pouring from its leaders and most of its people, on your campus and into the streets where its people are? If not, something is terribly wrong!

Christianity is not just the proclamation of the Gospel; it is also the example of the Gospel!

This begs for a question: *why do so many Christians see their faith as "on hold" until when it may be needed, and/or are doing nothing or just what they can get away with?*

Is the *Fruit of the Spirit* in you and in your Church?

How many of us have ever ventured into a church that was filled with unkindness, where we were ignored or even mistreated and where the church seemed more like a thorn bush than a fruitful vine...a church filled with a bad atmosphere from the bad spiritual breaths of its people making smog instead of the sweet fragrance of God's presence and love? As a pastor, I have a tough battle to make sure my flock behaves so that Christ would be pleased. And of course, I need to set the tone. I can try my best to set an example so I am not a thorn bush, and I can teach; but I cannot make them behave! I can model, teach, disciple, urge, and pray. But, real, authentic Christian love comes solely from a real, authentic Christian formation. This is caused from the Fruit of the Spirit growing in each of us. If someone is not growing in the Lord, he/she is not willing or able to treat others with love and respect, nor is he/she able to model and do and be as Christ exemplified and taught. Care, compassion, and a real affection for others will be moot, love will be stifled, and kindness absent; and no matter how good the campus, teaching, or mission are, all that will be noticed is an annoying noise. The church will be an irritating and frustrating club of stubborn prideful people, devoid of harmony and brotherly love—devoid of Christ! Do we really want that? If not, what are you willing to do about it?

The essential way to grow a church is to be faithful with our Fruit! No one wants to come to a club where the people are *angry, bitter, immoral, impure, corrupt, into idolatry and witchcraft, and full of hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness...*and so forth! These are the key words Paul talked about in Romans, chapter one. It is the same with a local church; who wants strife when care and friendship are called for and needed? People will come to a place where there is love and joy, where they are treated with kindness, cared for, allowed to work on themselves while being shown patience and the composure of Christ from the leaders. We need to know that we display Christ by our attitudes and actions. If we do not do this right from what Jesus modeled and taught, we will get our churches all skewed upside down and wrong. We will be the church of the thorn-bush, a fruit-stand devoid of fruit, a place of dysfunction instead of a church of Jesus Christ and His transforming power!

Remember: Christ did not give up on us when things went from bad to worse with our sin. His grace, forgiveness, and perseverance came to us anyway!

A Fruitless Church is a Big Problem!

One of the main problems I have seen in the churches I have served and consulted for or have researched is the lack of Fruit from its leaders and members. We have to see this as a travesty before our Holy God. It can come from the over-focus on the personality of a leader who is prideful or a preoccupation with a trend, giving no regard to the precepts of the Word, or the basic lack of kindness when you visit such a church. Some churches are good at one or two of the Fruits of the Holy Spirit to the exclusion of the rest of the Fruits. Maybe you will see big smiles from the pastor who is a good teacher, but sometimes impatient and cold—perhaps even smug. This can be from focusing on the Gifts of the Spirit while ignoring His call and Fruit of the Spirit. We

have church leaders and pastors concerned about being deliberate and intentional, thinking that “my church is exclusively my ministry; this is all about me.” They are all about building a legacy to themselves and how they want to build their church to and for themselves, something which they rationalize away using statistics, pop psychology, and business trends while ignoring the Word.

How many people, in an average, good church, practice the Fruit of the Spirit in that church? Well, we do not know yet. The initial research is all over the map from a mere twenty percent 20% to a quantity of eighty percent (80%) of church leaders who deem themselves fruitful. In the mean time, those under their leadership show a small deviation; a measly eighteen percent (18%) to an over seventy percent (70%) see their leaders as bearers of fruit. How many practice it at home? How many practice it at work? This is the research we are seeking. When we know what we are doing with our faith and fruit and see what Christ calls us to do, perhaps we can improve our church’s workplaces and our homes!

It seems, from our initial research (our partner the *Schaeffer Institute*) and experiences, that most Christians respond to their faith with a rear end firmly planted in a pew that goes nowhere near fruitful service or glory to Christ. They hold on to a will that does not allow conviction or change to their routine or life. Thus, church is just a club for comfort and not a “huddle” to strategize and put forward how to play the game of Christian life after receiving our orders from the Coach. We need to know that Christ calls us to change our minds like we change the oil in the car. Look what Romans twelve tells us to do: “*devote themselves to him; and avoiding conformity to the world.*” In other words, we are to be changed, fruitful people so we can be change agents to others. Not to be infected by the world, but to help it along toward His purpose. We cannot do that when we are poured out to our will and desires only and not to our Lord. Oh, that we can be: “*...conformed to his holy will*”... “*to think humbly*”... “*to exercise faithfully*”... *to mutual love, diligence, patience, hope, prayer, hospitality, compassion, and condescension ... “and becoming conduct towards all men”!* Our devotion to Christ must be rooted in the mind and then let the Fruit translate it to the feet and the rest of our bodies in between—the body of us as human beings and a body of believers in relation to all those around us, which is our duty (Rom. 12:9-13).

A lack of Fruit is what Christ was so concerned about with the leaders of His day (just read Matthew 23) and why He spoke so much about this and that the coming judgment for our actions and responsibility. We will be held accountable as followers and especially as leaders; thus, we have to know what we are called to do. It starts with knowing Christ and then learning how He wants us to operate. Saved? Yes! To say this another way, as the Book of James asks us, ***what good is our faith if we misuse it or do nothing with it?*** Galatians, chapter five, gives us a key template to the Christian life and how to do ministry. And guess what; the churches that are Fruitful—as in the out flowing of the Fruit of the Spirit—are the ones that grow more, not only in numbers, but in faith and things that matter to our Lord! Just look how we will be judged in the eternity to come; our reward will not depend on how well and how often we exercised our gifts, but how well we produced the crop of effectual Fruit. Yes, the gifts and jobs of ministry

are important; but the Fruit is the essential essence of our call. This is what is fundamental and indispensable for a capable leader and for an effective church!

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We are Called to Emulate Christian Virtues!

Fruit of the Spirit, Part XIII

The sad fact is that the average Christian does not make the Fruit of the Spirit a priority in his/her life; this should cause us intense concern. And, even worse off are our leaders! This is why I believe we have so many thorn-bush churches and few fruit-stand churches. I am not saying those who do not practice the Fruit are not saved, because it is not for me or anyone to judge salvation; nevertheless, we should be deeply disturbed by this, for we are known by our Fruit! And, if there is no effective Fruit displayed from a person who claims Christ as Lord, then that person is detached from the nutrients of the Vine (John 15)! If your church is not displaying *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*, the question becomes, "is Christ there?" The evidence says "no," or at the very least "knocking at the door trying to get in!"

We are also duty-bound to be diligent in taking and receiving His flow of the Spirit, not for our salvation, but to grow in life and ministry. These benefits are the reasons we are given this precious opportunity to have the Fruit of the Spirit. God's love working in us needs to be known and then applied to be effective and real to us and to those around us. If we know them and then do nothing with them, they are as useless as having health insurance but not using it when you get sick. The same is true with trying to apply a Fruit without understanding what it is and how it is to be used. We would be inflicted with an imitation or a skewed and perhaps even rotten fruit as His marvelous fruit would go unnoticed and unused. It is like never filling out the forms and starting the benefits. Not knowing God's precepts means we would not be able to apply them, because what we are applying is not of Him!

We have both privileges and responsibilities in our Lord. God has given us gifts, abilities, and promises that we are not to store when needed. When they are needed, they are for us to persistently use! Such benefits given will not only profit us in our intimate relationship to Christ, but also empower us to build much heartier relationships with others, too. So, do not be shortsighted concerning your faith and the opportunities Christ has and will still bring. If we do not have a desire to pursue the will of God, we have to ask ourselves *why?* and *what is in the way?* Most, if not all of the time, it is the desire of sin that blocks us. Sometimes we may not recognize sin and rather rationalize it away. This happens especially when our view of Christ and/or our involvement in discipleship is ignored or "dumbed down." We seek things that tickle our ears but that

require no due diligence on our part. Our election is proven by our obedience and growth in Christ!

This is the willingness to live out the Christian life we claim we are living. It is the actual implementation of His precepts into our daily lives, because these precepts are better than anything we could have planned on our own. We must have a life that matches what we say we believe; faith is the quintessential tool to make this happen both individually and collectively with one another in a church. This is where we take what we have learned and believe and put it into action in our relationships and opportunities. The practice of the Fruit of the Spirit means that our faith and our deeds do not operate independently of each other. To make this happen further, we must have a mind that is focused, to the best of our ability, on God's precepts and character. Instead of filling our mind with needless junk, let us fill it up with things that will help us grow in our faith. Instead of a romance novel or a cheap magazine, pick up a good book, a classic, a book to help you grow; read the ultimate Book, His Word, the Bible. If you are willing to grow closer to God, then fill your mind with things and ideas that are pleasing to Him (Psalm 34:4-6; Rom. 12:1-3; 1 Cor. 2:16; James 2:18; 1 Peter 2:1-2).

We are Called to Stretch and Grow beyond what we Think we can Do!

It grieves our Lord deeply when we reject Him or turn from Him and His ways. He is especially grieved when we seek the tantalizations the world has to offer and ignore His wonder and blessings. As our Lord showed us by example, we are to follow up by caring for His people—our brothers and sisters in the Lord. This is a call to *rescue*, like a lifeguard rescuing a person who is drowning. People all around us are drowning in a sea of lost hope; your church can be the instrument God uses to offer them the lifeline of hope. This purpose can be accomplished by our working production of Fruit, praying, and example with humility, sensitivity, persistence, and by going out of our way for them.

Ministry is not just the proclamation of the Gospel; it is the example of the Gospel!

This is what it means to be in Christ; He is lived out in the lives of believers as they show real compassion for individuals. If we are not doing this, we are not doing ministry. We are to not only care in word, but also in deeds; even if we have to confront someone, we are always to do it in love and within the parameters of the Fruit of the Spirit. Thus, when we see someone start to stray, we are to come along side him/her in love and help him/her back to His path. We are to show His love and our genuine concern by being willing and able to help out beyond our comfort zone and cultural considerations. Do not wait; we are called to care and to care *now!*

But what is in the Way of our Fruit Production?

When we become a Christian either by birth in a Christian family (to slowly understand Who and What Christ is and over time make a commitment to Him) or

through evangelism as an adult (a quick response when ones realizes their sin and need for grace and then commits to Christ), a time must come when the reality of who we are in Christ hits home in power and conviction. The black, dirty slime of our minds has to completely change to the new, golden anointing oil of His Fruit, love, and precepts. This will transform us into practical applications of His will in His church. But, our faith just does not come about on its own; something wondrous must take place within us to transform us so we can trust. This is what the Holy Spirit is doing in our Fruit of the Spirit production and cultivation. In other words, we must become the people of God in order to be capable and willing to do the work of God.

Keep in mind this Fruit is mutual; it takes the power of the Holy Spirit to keep us motivated, especially in the leadership of the church and the common places of personal life! This is how the Christian life is to be practical and outgoing—not sedentary and inclusive. Since God saved us, we in turn are compelled to show our response, to work in Christ's behalf, to be His agents, powered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel message, even in our own church. This will allow us to have discipline and restraint with obedience to God and others. We must refuse to let distractions derail or remove us from His will and plan so we will not be held back with what Christ called us to do (Prov. 16:32; 25:28; Rom 13:12-14; 1 Cor. 6:12; 9:25-27; Col. 3:16; 1Thess. 5: 22; Titus 2:12; Heb. 12:2; 2 Pet. 1:5-7).

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Are you Led by the Spirit?

Fruit of the Spirit, Part XIV

Being led by the Spirit is not a Pentecostal or charismatic endeavor; it is not about speaking in tongues or some esoteric Baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is not a special anointing or a blessing or a gift we receive from God or an emissary of His, most of whom are, more often than not, false anyway. Rather, pure and true from God's Word, being led by the Spirit means we are empowered by Him and this is primarily evidenced by who and how we are. The Fruit of the Spirit is the quintessential template and means to recognize His lead, and that Christ has taken root in us and thus is alive and well in our congregation. Such a lead will greatly affect your relationships, family, work, school, church, and life in general; this is the real, effectual fruit that shows Christ's impact, plan, and power to others, especially to non-Christians. So; are you led by the Spirit or led by your own means? If by the Spirit, how is this working in your church? How is Christ displayed and glorified?

We can master the entire Bible, go to seminary, read all of the great Christian books, and even be totally transformed by the Word; but, if nothing comes from the Spirit—God's work in us—it is empty and of no real value! Our faith must have a response to it. Yes we may be saved, but what good is it if we do not have gratitude or

allow the continual, effectual work of the Spirit within us? To do nothing with our faith development means we are not being transformed and not being led or empowered by the Fruit of the Spirit. Do not let this happen to you or your church!

The Christian life can be a difficult journey! We live in a fallen world corrupted by sin. Consequently, all that we do is imperfect and a struggle. We make choices that affect the direction in which we proceed in life and in relationships. In so doing, we affect others around us in both positive and negative ways. Yet, when our efforts and motivations are centered upon being righteous, we will be doing as we are called to do, and even be blessed for it.

As Christ's disciples, we must be willing to be led by the truth of His Word and by our faith and trust in Him. Because faith is also in community and mutual, we each partake in Christ and need one another to grow further in our pilgrimage of Christian living. This is what your church needs to be about! In so doing, we share Christ and therefore proclaim Him to those who do not know Him. To be a good church, we are called to glorify Christ in all that we do! In this manner, as both a global Church and a local church, we must also demonstrate His love in how we relate to others. And know this: everything that is worthy and excellent requires more work, from painting a house to preaching the Word. This journey of difficulty should not discourage us because it will build us up to be much better, stronger, and of greater use to God as we put into practice what He puts in us (Phil. 2:12-13).

So, enjoy it! See it as an adventure from which to learn and grow. Our character will improve and enable us to overcome all obstacles and help others through them. Thus, we should make it a point to give Him our best for His glory because He first loved us, and we respond to His Grace with our gratitude. At the same time, we can take comfort in the fact that He will not give us anything we cannot handle (Phil 2:10-13; Heb. 2:10)! So, let us live with excellence, to our best for His glory!

Is your Thinking Right? Are your Behaviors are Right?

Good theology is our right thinking of God's precepts, including the knowledge of His Fruit. Our mind and thinking must be based on Christ and Scripture through which the Spirit guides us (2 Cor. 4:18; 1 John 2:17). If not, our culture and the pleasures of life will sweep us away from God's best for us. This is our Christian life and purpose! This is the boot camp and the army is our duty in application. Yet, it is the least thing considered by the average Christian's pursuit, especially those who never take ownership of their faith, who grew up in a church considering it as cultural and a duty rather than devotion and lifestyle. Thus, our churches become fruit-stands that have no fruit in them, just a shell of a building without His real substance, impact, and power penetrating. The danger is for the Christian to sit in a pew, learn all that he/she can, and take comfort in that knowledge, but never do anything with it. This creates the church that refuses to evangelize or reach others, or display Christ by their words and deeds. The Christian that refuses to share his/her faith usually is one who is not growing in that faith. Thus, faith and Fruit may be miserly trickled out on Sunday but no display or

model of Christ is present on Monday. Be aware that you will be harshly judged; you are no better than the Pharisees! The proof test is *do you use people, or serve them?* Do you just gather information, or do you apply it (Hos.6:6; Mica. 6:6-8; Matt. 12 9-14; 23; James 1:21-27)?

In Romans 12: 1-2, we are called as church folks to passionately pursue God's will, and that is to think rightly of His precepts. By doing so, we can make our faith real so it impacts others around us. This is what a collection of Christians is called to and should do to build a healthy, well-balanced church that glorifies Christ. The simple way we can do this is to see our lives as extensions of God's grace and hands, so we are willing and able to be lined up to Him and be better used by Him. We are called to be a *living sacrifice*, which means we are to be living, growing, and performing Fruit agents of God. We are not alone in this essential matter. As Christians, we are transformed completely by the Spirit; this includes all we are and all that we are to do—our will, our plans, and our opportunities (2 Cor. 3:18). We cannot do this unless we give our selfish will and pride and past hurts over to Him (John 3:30; Gal. 2:20-21; Phil. 3:1-14)! The incentive for us to surrender to Christ is that His Way is better than ours! He gave us a gift we cannot fathom, let alone earn the gift of grace and eternal life, so why would we not seek to please our Living Loving Lord?

When we are growing in Christ, we will be displaying Christ—our “reasonable service” as church leaders! Then we will have real ripe and pleasing Fruit; God's will is for us to be willing and able to please and serve Him. This is accomplished when we are on guard so that the distractions of the sinful life will not entice, motivate, or divert us from Him and His plan for us! The call is simple: be willing to allow God to transform you rather than the world; simple? Yes, but it takes diligent effort and the trust we have in Christ to succeed as a church and as individual people of faith! When we do this, our thinking, attitude, and mindset will change and then impact all that we do in life.

Questions to ponder:

1. We are called to stretch and grow beyond what we think we can do! Remember, our Lord offers His encouragement for all those who are in Him to grow in Him!
2. What does it take for you to have a greater desire and ability to grow, practice, and apply your faith?
3. What does it mean to you to make every conceivable effort to put into practice your faith and fruit? How is this necessary for your life?
4. What have you received from Christ that drives your life? What is in the way? What are you going to do about it?

Remember, Christ is our Empowerment and our Example!

All churches will have fighting and squabbling. We are all in some process of sanctification and growth and we are not perfect—or called to be so. The question is, *are we on the right road that delivers the fruit or are we just stationed at the fruit-stand and not restocking it?* A prime purpose of the Church supposedly is to show and give out the Fruit, but many of us find ourselves empty. Are we making the effort to pick out the rotten fruit and throw it away? If you want to be successful in life, church, and ministry, you need to get this point: we are to be *fruit makers*. The primary purpose of doing church is not to just please ourselves, but to glorify and serve our Living God. Our lives as Christians are about how we live out His work and honor our Lord; we can best do this by applying our faith and growth in Him to display and give out this Fruit in our church relationships.

Having trouble? Take heart! Christ is the One who changes us and forms our Fruit. All we do is affectionately and in gratitude respond by faith and commit to His precepts. This requires our continual commitment to prevent our bad behaviors or body language from discouraging others from Christ and His Church.

Remember, *Christianity is not just the proclamation of the Gospel; it is also the example of the Gospel!* The action from your faith will reflect our Lord and either build or destroy your church! Consider this; the fruits and character that we have been given freely cost dearly; they are not cheap. Jesus Christ bought them and then brought them for and to us, for our betterment and to His glory. We must not take for granted what cost Him so much!

Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Proverbs 3:3

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How is your Spiritual Fruit?

Fruit of the Spirit, Part XV

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Gal. 5:1

Galatians 5:16-26

In the previous article in this series, *The Rotten Fruits and What They Do*, we were shown and given a choice about the Fruit of the Spirit, how we would live out our Christian lives. It all comes down to our willingness to either live a life that is led by the *Spirit* or one that is led by our *flesh*. I feel called to explore more on this theme because

the direction we choose will equal the type and quality of the fruit we make, either ripe and beneficial or rotten and damaging. We are offered a choice of roads in the Christian journey. *Will I live a life that is all about me or one that is all about Christ my Lord? Will I be selfish or truly Christ-like? Will my life be fruitless and faithless because I am stuck in my fears or because of hurts and frustrations that lead to doubts, anger, and then bitterness, strife, dysfunction, and so forth? Or, will I master my past, my sin, and my baggage and embrace my Lord who gives me a hope and future along with what I need to live a really good Christ-like life?*

When we start to think and believe more biblically, we will have lives that bring about love and goodness. We can have *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* flowing in, through, and out of us. If we rather focus on what someone did to us or what we did not get, we will bring about chaos and suffering instead of the hope and the prosperity of faith, which is what the Fruit of the Spirit brings to the table of life. This is accomplished when we make the choice to see Christ, take hold of His hand, take a stand of faith, and live a life that pleases Him. Our lives will be filled with His leading when we adhere to His Word and not to our personal pride, will, hurts, or dilemmas; we rather can prevent the *immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, and so forth* from being our way of life. We can choose to have a life that is joyful and fruitful. We are called and empowered to have a life that is filled with fruitfulness that benefits us, others, and glorifies our Lord (Gal. 5:16-26).

A Key to Making More Fruit of the Spirit

Your Christian “fruit salad” is predicated on how you perceive your life as well as how you receive and perceive our Lord. Life is not about our wants, needs, and comfort; it is about Christ working in us both powerfully and triumphantly. The key is for us to turn on this engine of our spiritual formation by our willingness to pursue, endure, and grow so the Holy Spirit and His Fruit can flow. We have to want our Lord’s empowerment to desire His Fruit, and we have to want to give it away to others. Allow the holiness of our Lord, His grace, His patience, understanding, faith, loyalty, goodness, and love to be exhibited in you—not by mere imitation, but with genuine gratitude and submission, *kept by His power* (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 1:27; Gal. 5). God does indeed give us what we need to succeed. We can have the faith to remain in Him regardless of what is going on outside of ourselves or the feelings we experience on the inside. He will give us all we need; He will water, cultivate, and harvest, and also give us the mercy and tenderness to go on. We must allow our faith to build so it does not bring us down or motivate others negatively. Remember, the great hope is still to come.

We have to get rid of the mess that is messing us up! To make us pure, He needs to prune and refine us, get us to come away from our selves, move us from our fears and frustrations so we can embark on our victorious Christian life. We have to master what hinders us—the sin and past hurts that infect us—so they can be dealt with and placed under control along with the apathy and compliancy we settle into. If we do

not master what hinders us, it will master us; however, in Christ, we can master it and add it to our arsenal of learning and growth. In this way, Fruit can fill us up and spill over on others around us. This is not something we need to fear; it is not drudgery but an opportunity to be more than we could ever be on our own. Our growth in Him means faith, spiritual maturity, and character development. These are things more precious than any gold, personal success, or financial portfolio. As we go through the tough stuff of life, we will grow and become stronger. We will worship Him more profoundly and purely. We will honor Him more strongly, more relevantly, and touch the lives of others more deeply, too.

When we *labor* and *strive* for our Lord, we accomplish something grand and fulfilling. This theme and wording, “We can work it out” comes from a Greek athletic term meaning to *compete in and then complete the competition faithfully*. Paul uses this term many times to mean that divine empowerment is within us; we have the Spirit’s enabling as we work out our faith and strive so we can produce Fruit through Christian living. We can do this and do it well, as we receive the continual work of the Holy Spirit and keep on responding in order to become a useful Christian through our practical application of faith. This means we live for and in Christ, and avoid the things that hinder us like lust and selfish desires or our doubts and disappointments that languish and distract us from His plan and path. Remember, the primary Fruit of the Spirit is Love; this is what we receive in Christ. It is a duty and fruit we live and share with others around us. In hard times, our fruit production comes from our Faith production, and that comes from the Spirit’s work in us that requires support to move on to perseverance (Jer. 12:5; Matt. 28:20; Luke 11:13; John 14:17; Acts 1:8; 4:3; 10:45; 19:1-2; Rom. 8:1-11; 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 15:10, 58; Gal. 5:13-26, Eph. 3:16-17; Col. 1:24-29; Heb. 13:5-6; Rev. 3:20)!

How is your “fruit salad?” Fresh and delicious, or spoiled and unconsumed? What needs to be tended or pruned from you? What is missing in your fruitfulness? Usually, it is the full trust and hold we are to have for Christ. Also, that we are not fully adhering to His call to know and grow in Him so we can model Him. This does not mean something is missing from our redemption or His Work or is deficient in some way; rather it is a call to trust and take hold of Him to make it all work for us in our daily lives. Does this mean we need to add to His salvation with our merit or our own sufferings, or as the Catholic Church teaches, “The Messiah’s Birth Pangs,” meaning we vicariously partake in His sufferings? Or does it mean that the Church continues in some incarnational role of redemption? More accurately, in the production of the Fruit of the Spirit, we carry on His work of being His work by displaying and deploying His work, explaining His work, and bringing His work to others. By this, we are not contributing to our salvation; rather, we are receiving and demonstrating it. When we are weak in faith or consumed by our fears and frustrations, too focused on our doubts, and bogged down in our circumstances, we prove that we are not fully aware of the Total Sufficiency of Christ that enables us to be fruitful and live a joyful, empowered, and impacting Christian life (Col. 1:14; 2:8-10; 14; 1 Thess. 3:2-4).

Do not allow your stuff to get in the way of your Fruit.

Fruit of the Spirit, Part XVI

This is not a popular thing to discuss, but the Christian life comes with a responsibility, so we are not to allow our desires or dilemma or pressures to distract us from it (Matt. 25:35-36; Rom. 12:10; 14:23; Phil. 2:3-4; Col. 3:23; 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2 Pet. 1:7). So, if you really want to grow in Christ and be an influential and effectual Christian, you have to give yourself up. The Christian life requires surrender of the Will, as in self-denial and obedience to Him (Rom. 6:3-7; 17-22). Few people desire to be challenged or convicted from their thinking and comfort zones. They see this as confining, or bigoted. What needs to take place, besides the work of the Spirit, to make surrender happen? In so doing, will it change our behavior, which will help us rid ourselves of whatever barriers that stop our effective fruit production? Yes, the call is to fill up with Him and not with the ways of the world (Matt. 28:19-20; Rom. 3:21-26; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Gal 2:20-21; Col 1:27)!

We can get ourselves better lined up to God's will and call when we become more devoted to Him and obey His precepts from His Scriptures. We are called to bring God's Word not only into our lives and the Church, but also into the world—to be His instruments of peace and reconciliation, denoting faithfulness, as in to obey and to fulfill (Acts 20:27; 2 Tim. 4:7).

Does this sound difficult? Keep in mind you have *Christ in you*, meaning we as Christians have the indwelling of Christ in us now and we have a future glory too! The Messiah has come; He inhabits the Christian, and the Christian can partake of Him. Because of this, we possess astounding riches, opportunities, and blessings (Isa. 42:6; 45:21; 49:6; 52:10; 60:1-3; Psalm 22:27; 65:5; 98:2-3; John 14:23; Rom. 8:11; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1:7, 13-18; 3:8-19; 1 Pet. 1:3-4).

Does this still sound difficult? Keep in mind that Christ *will never leave you*. This is a promise of God, meaning we have freedom from fear, as our Lord is our partner in life and faith. Those past failings, things and stuff done to us, and/or bad choices that keep us imprisoned in our fears can stop us in our tracks from accomplishing or even realizing what we have and can do. Christ is in you! He will not leave you! This was a great comfort given to a people who were thinking of leaving the Church. Our confidence is in Christ and not our situations (Deut. 31:6-8; Jos. 1:5; 2 Chron. 15:2; Psalm 37:28).

Be encouraged: you can make lots of Fruit!

So much “stuff” gets in the way of His Way and our call to be a fruitful impact to others. It comes down to how we perceive ourselves: are we the masters, or is He the

Master of our lives? We need to understand and acknowledge our direct, personal knowledge and recognition we have in Christ, to act with fruitfulness. Because we know Christ and have the fullness of the Gospel, we can be assured of our salvation, and be fully engaged in Him with the application of faith to our lives. We make our Fruit positive when we are completely yielding to Christ as LORD. This means we embrace the “Christo-centric” life as opposed to the “self-centered” life in which so many Christians engage. There is the old saying that “you can be so heavenly minded that you are of no earthly good.” However, that statement is backwards; we are called to be heavenly minded and when we are, we are good and fruitful to and for others also. Too many Christians are so earthly minded that they are of no good—period! They are not heavenly minded and thus lead dysfunctional and purposeless lives. You can be functional, productive, useful, and an impact, but you have to want it and engage in it and Him (Col. 1:9; 2 Pet. 1:5-8).

Another way to look at this is to see what God brings to us—His *full riches* and *assurance*. We have at our disposal the fullness and “super-abundance” in Christ, which gives us certainty and confidence. For the first century Jew, wisdom meant true wealth from God. The more you knew, the better you were in His sight. This produced arrogance and the lack of concern to applying His truth. The thinking was “all I have to do is know, and thus I do not have to do.” This is actually partially true; for the more we learn about Him, the better we can model, teach, and worship Him—as long as our pride does not get in the way. Christ calls us to know and then to do. Remove the arrogance and whatever gets in the way, then the indifference and wounds start to disappear, and service and maturity replace them (Job 28:12-19; Psalm 19:10; 119:14, 72,127,162; Prov. 3:13-15; Isa. 33:6).

We can take heart, that *Christ is revealed* to us. As a Christian, you automatically will produce the Fruit of the Spirit, because the Spirit is in and working in you. The question is *what value and measure, what quantity and quality will you bring to the table of life? Will it be rotten or good, little or lots, some or not much at all?* We are in Christ; therefore we can know Him intimately. Christ is the Lord God Almighty who lives and reigns in you. So, what are you going to do about it? God designed you to be loved and to give love. He became incarnate to redeem you to make this so, as well as to make His principles available to you so you could know Him. You are valuable, and what our Lord gives you is not unattainable or concealed; it is at your hand and call. For the Christian, He is before us in plain view; His plan is fully and freely given to us by Christ. The only ones from whom it is hidden or to whom it is not available are those who do not know Christ. We have no need to fret and fear; we are able to understand God's authentic Truth and partake in His Kingdom because we have His Holy Spirit (Mark 4:22; Luke 8:17; John 1:18; 1 Cor. 1:21-25; Col. 1:9, 26; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:2-3).

You have the real treasure in the Truth of the Gospel (John 1:14; 1 Cor. 2:6-8; Eph. 1:8-9; 3:8-9; Col. 1:8; 2:9-10). You have the wisdom and knowledge of the ages at your fingertips. This means the attainment of truth and prudence regarding our judgments is at your beck and call. You have the knowledge to build your faith by His Spirit and Word, which must come before we apply our faith. But, real faith and spiritual

growth must never rest on our knowledge and thinking alone, for then it is empty and of no use (Luke 11:42; 18:10-14; John 14:1-6; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 2:8-9 James 2:14). There is no excuse not to seek the application of His truth with our actions. When we do this, we model righteousness, holiness, and sanctification (Deut 4:6; 1 Kings 3:9; Psalm 119:97-98; Matt. 6:33; Rom. 11:33; 12:3; 1 Cor. 12:8; 1 Tim. 1:18-20).

When we exercise encouragement, we transcend distance and expand relationships. This is a prime theme of friendship—the longing to help others strive for the faith and be better in community and cooperation rather than be in isolation and emptiness. When Paul states *I am with you even though I am not physically there*, he is expressing affection and intimacy (1 Cor. 5:3-4; 14:40; Col. 2:1-5; 1 Thess. 2:17).

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Making Fruit of the Spirit is Mutual and Communal

Fruit of the Spirit, Part XVII

We need one another to help spur on and encourage us. Paul, even through his heinous situations of being in prison, being whipped and beaten, having everyone against him and seeking to kill him, takes the time to agonize, pray, and encourage his besieged church and of course, under the Holy Spirit's inspiration write about these Fruits of the Spirit. His care and concern are shown even to those he does not personally know but who know him. This encouragement is personal, yet is not limited to only those who are close to him. Paul's goal was that from mutual support would flow confidence. God knows that we all need this vital and personal impact to get us through life and ministry endeavors. The support of one for another must be shown both in a church collectively, and in individual persons in order to yield healthy relationships. Encouragement is a key motivator to our productiveness. Our efforts must be fulfilled in our relationship with Christ so that we are knit together by our love and Fruit. In so doing, we model and give assurance and hope that build upon one another's faith and that display the wonders of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Yes we can—yes, you can! Our full confidence comes from the personal relationship with and full impact we have in Christ. Therefore, it is our duty to exhibit it even when times are uncertain and wearisome. In so doing, others may receive a model of confidence and faith in Christ that will help them handle the adversities of life. God has a plan; it is secret to those who do not want to know it and open to those who know Him. It is simple: Christ is our Savior and Lord, and who we are is based on who we are in Him. Our true treasure is Christ and His empowerment, the impact as well as the knowledge, wisdom, and faith He gives us for daily living. All we need is hidden in Christ; yet, He gives us the key to open it up and empowers us to use it. In so doing, no one will be able to deceive us with false ideas or persuasive words. When we are uncertain as a Church, we should have people near and far to help us as well as the

Holy Spirit's empowerment. This strong faith in Christ as Lord should make us happy and content.

Consider that the Christian life, as presented by Paul in many places, is set in the theme and the language of a sport, more specifically an Olympic event—an epic athletic contest—and the efforts that must be put forth to “enter” and “place” in such an event. Paul equates this to the personal life and the spiritual life. To be successful, we have to extend our effort and obligation in whatever event we enter; this applies to faith too. In addition, Paul even alludes to “honor.” Being an athlete at that time was not just a personal honor; you represented your city and state and pointed to a greater reality and endeavor that showed *community*. Your reward then was not a gold medal, but rather a crown made up of olive leaves; nonetheless it was a great and stupendous honor. This is a reflection of how we honor Christ by our active faith and how we dishonor Him by our apathy. As we face conflict, adversity, trials, and obstacles, we require training and preparation so we can be fit to run through them and produce Fruit by the Spirit's empowerment, not be tripped up by our fat of fear or atrophy of non-preparation because of past failures (Col. 1:29; 2:1-8).

This “striving” in and with the faith, the competition and struggle like an athlete goes through to train, prepare, and then compete is comparable to us and life, church, family, and setbacks (you can add in here what you struggle with and what your worst fear is.) Christ will bear it! We receive it, but we have to continue to work on it, to learn, grow, and build up our faith and maturity. If not, we would not be able to stand, let alone be fruitful in the race of life and faith. Allow yourself to be inspected, challenged, and encouraged about your spiritual condition so your self-satisfaction and complacency does not get in the way (Col. 4:12-16; Rev. 3:14-22).

A lot has been said about “purpose”—its significance and role. But, keep in mind that it is biblical. We are called and we do have a purpose. The word and theme are clearly Scriptural as what many have said of it. Real purpose is to know who we are in Christ, understand what He has done for us, and then the acting out of our relationship and redemption by being obedient to God's will. This is also the key to our Fruitful efforts. It will come from our determination to place Him first in our lives and allow Him to lead. This was Paul's mission, along with teaching, modeling, and encouraging others for the faith. This is what helps us spur on one another's faith and fruit, as confidence regarding who we are in Christ and the veracity of the Bible's teaching gives us greater substance for conviction and strength for living life and growing spiritually. A real, effectual, purpose-driven life is always about Christ as Lord and our surrender to His Lordship so we can have the Fruit of the Spirit flowing in and through us (Psalm 57; 138:7-8; Prov. 19:21; John 15; Rom. 8; Phil. 2:1-18; 2 Tim. 1:8-12)!

Be encouraged and be comforted; you are called to cheer, reassure, strengthen, comfort, and warn one another. Paul models this and gives us a picture of the loving shepherd. He is literally giving us a divine message, and handing over insights and truths from The Word of Christ (Acts 19:33; 1 Cor. 2:16; 11:2; 2 Thess. 3:6). Think what you and your church can do when you are all *knitted together in love*. We are called, as

one of the purposes of the church, to join together as a group united in faith, reason, and companionship, with love and Fruit at the foundation. This is how a church and family must exist to be healthy. It is essential that the pastor, church leaders, and members be united in Christ so the fruit does not rot, and by His love and according to His Word, exercise the full understanding of His call and instructions and thus dwell as a cohesive unity, a Body of Christ (Luke 10:25-29; John 4:24; 10:25-30; 17:21-23; Acts 2 - 4; Rom. 1:16-17; 12:1-3; 1 Cor. 12; Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 1:10; 5:30; Phil. 2:5-8; Col. 1; James 4:8-11).

If you are truly a Christian, your life must show a degree of Fruit and Faith; if it does not, something is wrong. Either you are having a bad day, thus difficulty with focusing on Christ, or you are too bogged down in hurts and fears, doubts and apathy, or pride and busyness. If acting immorally, if you are always hateful, if you like to sow discord or you are jealous, tend to have fits of anger, and/or are overly consumed with your own self and ambition, perhaps you are not saved?! If Christ is manifested in you, He will show through you. So stop and drop; drop to your knees and seek Christ. If you feel like putting others down, enjoy sowing discord, like to gossip and condescend or are so busy you never look up at Christ...get help; seek Christ. If you are a leader and are up to these no good rotten fruits, do your church a big favor and please leave. Get out of the church; do not walk, but run to the nearest exit and go away. You do not belong there in leadership until you are ready and willing to face Christ, repent, get help, and start to be fruitful!

What shows others that Christ is real and working in you? The answer is how you are, what you say, how you say it, your character, and temperament, all predicated by God's work produced in you. The Fruit of the Spirit comes as our faith responds and resounds so we indeed produce His Fruits. Making a public profession or testimony of faith is good, but if what we say and do does not match who we are supposed to be, which is Christ like, do you believe others will see Him in you? As a follower of Christ, you are His message and display. Allow His transforming power and Holy Spirit to move your Will and feet; if you do not, you are of no good to God or those around you. Now, think through what you can do to make sure your testimony stays on God's track and the fruits you produce are from Gal 5:22-23, not from verses 18-21.

Yes indeed; you can do it. You can be fruitful and productive for our Lord no matter who you are, what you have been through, where you are, or what you will face!

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit will reap eternal life. Galatians 6:7-8

Remember these resources are free for you! Most ministries only sell there materials, we feel we are doing what God has called us too, by going ahead and offering the best materials possible for free and seek support for doing so. There is no obligation but please consider supporting our ministry if you are able to do so. As these materials have cost us a tremendous amount of time effort and financial resources that have taken us years to develop for you!

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Richard Joseph Krejcir is the Director of 'Into Thy Word Ministries, 'a Missions and discipling ministry. He is the author of several books including, Into Thy Word as well as numerous articles, curriculumms and solid Biblical resources. He is also a pastor, teacher, speaker and a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena California and currently completing his Ph.D in practical theology. He has amounted over 20 years of pastoral ministry experience, mostly in youth ministry, including serving as a church growth consultant.