

**Sermon – Fruit of the Spirit**  
**Sunday July 2, 2023**

Have you ever tried to change something about yourself but couldn't?

Maybe you're a worrier. If worrying was an Olympic sport you'd win a medal. In school, you worried about your grades. After you graduated, you worried about getting a job. After you got a job, you worried about being in a relationship. After you found a relationship, you worried about whether you could afford to get married.

But you don't want to be this way. You want to live with a sense of God's peace. So you pray, you give things over to God, but you still struggle with worry. In fact, you worry that you worry too much.

Or maybe you spend too much time on your phone. You spend hours looking at your social media, watching movies and playing games. You tell yourself it's just a distraction. You've been working hard and you just need to unwind. But when you look at the time, you can't believe half the day has gone by and you haven't done any work.

But you don't want to be this way. You want to control your impulses and do what you need to do. So you promise yourself you won't use your phone as much. But you need to check the weather, so you turn on your phone and instantly you forget what you were going to do. You go to your Netflix app and before you know it, you're watching your favourite K drama.

Or maybe your mood goes up and down depending on your circumstances. When things are good, you feel great. You go out with your friends and you do things you enjoy. But when things are bad, you get moody. You're irritable and short-tempered. You mope and complain. You lash out at the people around you.

But you don't want to be this way. You want to have joy regardless of your circumstances. You know you have so much to be thankful for, so you decide to keep a gratitude journal. It goes well for awhile, but then you have a few bad days. You stop journaling and you fall into another funk.

What's something you want to change about yourself?

- Maybe you want to be more patient with your kids.
- Maybe you want to want to respond better when you're mistreated.
- Maybe you want to be less angry.
- Maybe you want to let go of some grudges.
- Maybe you want to overcome an addiction.

And you've tried working on it. You make goals, you listen to sermons, you read books. And you get a little better... in the beginning, but after awhile you fall back into your old habits.

You feel frustrated and hopeless. You feel discouraged and defeated. You wonder, Will I ever change? Will I always be this way? Is there any hope for me?

How do you change your character when you've tried everything, but nothing works?

We're starting a new sermon series today. It's called *Marks of a Flourishing Life: Fruit that Nourishes Relationships*.

During this series we'll be talking about change. We'll be talking about the character that grows in the life of the believer. But growing in this character isn't something we can do ourselves; it's something the Holy Spirit does.

That's why they're marks of a flourishing life. It's what happens when you're walking with God. The Bible calls it the fruit of the spirit. The fruit of the spirit consists of nine virtues. Each Sunday in this series, we'll be unpacking each virtue and learning how to cultivate them in our lives.

The fruit of the spirit is described in Galatians 5.

**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.**

**(Galatians 5:22-26)**

Today we're kicking off this series with an introduction to the fruit of the spirit. I'm indebted to Tim Keller and a sermon he preached on this. But what I want to do today is look at What is the fruit of the spirit and How do you cultivate it in your life?

First, **What is the fruit of the spirit?**

To understand what the fruit of the spirit is, we need to go back a few verses.

**So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever <sup>(e)</sup> you want. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Galatians 5:16-18)**

Before Paul explains the fruit of the spirit, he contrasts two ways of living: living by the desires of the flesh and living by the Spirit.

What does Paul mean by "desires of the flesh"?

When you think of flesh, what do you think of? You probably think of the body. You think of fleshly and carnal desires. But that's not what Paul is talking about. Paul uses the term flesh to describe our sinful nature.

Gratifying our sinful nature isn't just indulging our sinful desires.

**Gratifying our sinful nature is putting myself at the centre.** It's making everything about ME - my needs, my desires, my pleasures. It's self-centredness, self-absorption, self-justification. In every relationship, in everything I do, it's asking, How will this benefit me?

Have you ever known someone who lived only for their pleasures and desires? What does that look like? Paul says that:

**The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;<sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions<sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. (Galatians 5:19-20)**

Paul calls the consequences of a self-centred life the *acts of the flesh*.

But Paul says that there's another way to live. You can be led by the spirit. The spirit is contrary to the flesh. When you're led by the spirit, you have a different centre. You live for God's desires, God's pleasures, God's plan.

When this happens, the Holy Spirit produces God's character in you. You want to bless others, you want to serve them, you don't want to make it about you because you know you've been put on this earth for a purpose. And that purpose is to love God and to love others.

It was only 500 years ago that people realized that the universe revolved around the sun. Up until then for thousands of years, people believed the universe revolved around the earth. But when they made this discovery, everything changed – astronomy maps, theories about the earth – but do you know what the biggest change was?

It was how human beings saw their place in the world. Because they had to admit, *We are no longer the centre. The universe does not revolve around us.*

This is what happens when you're led by the Spirit. God-centredness displaces self-centredness. It's a Copernican revolution. You become a new person.

What impact does that have on you?

When you lived a self-centred life, the results were what Paul calls the *acts of the flesh*. You lived for yourself and you pursued your own goals. You didn't want to live that way, but you were powerless to change.

But when you make God the centre, the results are what Paul calls the *fruit of the spirit*. Fruit isn't something you grow on your own. Fruit is something God does. That's why fruit is a by-product. It's not something you can make happen, it's what happens in you when God is your centre.

What does that look like?

It looks like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,<sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. The Bible calls it the fruit of the spirit.

Here's the thing. When you look at this list what do you think? Your tendency is to look at all the fruit and choose the ones you're good at. You say, Well, I'm not so good at patience and kindness. But I am good at joy and peace. So I'll just focus on these ones.

But notice the word *fruit* – it's singular, not plural. Why is that important?

It's important because the fruit of the spirit isn't like strengths. With Strengths, you have both strengths and weaknesses. And the goal isn't to grow in every single area. The goal is to focus on your strengths.

The fruit of the spirit also isn't like spiritual gifts. The Bible says that there are many spiritual gifts. But the Holy Spirit doesn't give them all to every believer; he gives some to each believer. So while the whole

body may have all the gifts, you have only a few of them - and your goal is to use the gifts God has given you.

But the fruit of the spirit isn't like strengths or spiritual gifts. You don't pick and choose the ones you want. You don't get to say, I'm wired to be patient and kind so I'll focus on my strengths. You don't get to say, Other people are more gentle so I'll leave gentleness up to them.

As a Christian, you don't pick and choose the virtues you want to grow in. Which ones are you supposed to grow in? All of them. It's a package deal. You don't grow in all of them all at once, but over time you should be growing in all the fruit.

It's the fruit of the spirit, not the fruits of the spirit. It's one fruit with nine different aspects. It's like the facets of a diamond. Each facet isn't a separate diamond, it's a part of the same diamond which together make the diamond more beautiful.

We've talked a lot about the fruit of the spirit, so let's put it all together now. What is the fruit of the spirit?

**The fruit of the spirit is the character of God that the Holy Spirit produces in you.** It's what happens when God-centred living displaces self-centred living. It consists of nine virtues, nine aspects of God's character that Christians grow in as they walk with Jesus.

And one more thing about the fruit of the spirit. The fruit of the spirit isn't just for you. It's not just to improve your relationships and help you in life. The fruit of the spirit is for others too. It's a testimony to others of God's loving character and his desire to restore the world.

So that's what the fruit of the spirit is. But why is it important?

It's important because **The fruit of the spirit is the best indicator of your spiritual maturity.**

Because if you're growing in your spiritual maturity, you're growing in the fruit of the spirit. But the opposite is also true. If you're not growing in the fruit of the spirit, that means you're not growing in your spiritual maturity.

Isn't that a little harsh? What if you come to church regularly? What if you pray and read your Bible? What if you give and serve?

Here's the thing. When it comes to your spiritual maturity, the question isn't, Are you doing all these things? The question is, Are you bearing fruit?

So ask yourself that question: Are you bearing fruit?

Pastor Tim Keller says that if you're not growing in the fruit of the spirit, you can't be sure you're even a Christian.

This sounds harsh, but it shouldn't come as a surprise. Because Jesus often said the same thing.

One time Jesus said that one day many people will come to him. People who've served God and even performed miracles. And then Jesus will tell them, I never knew you.

Jesus often condemned the religious leaders. Outwardly, they were doing all the right things but inwardly, they had little love for people.

So how do you know if someone is growing in their spiritual maturity? You look at their fruit.

**By their fruit you will recognize them... every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. (Matthew 7:17-20)**

You may be doing all the right things, you may know all the right answers, people may even look up to you. But those things aren't the best indicator of your spiritual maturity. The best indicator of our spiritual maturity is whether you're bearing fruit.

Jesus says in John 15, I am the vine and you are the branches. If you abide in me, you will bear much fruit. And my Father will prune you so that you can be even more fruitful. But if you don't abide, you won't bear fruit and the Father will throw you into the fire.

Now there may be different reasons why there's no fruit. Fruit takes time to grow. And when fruit starts to grow, it's small and hardly noticeable. Also, sometimes there are dry seasons where there isn't much fruit. It may be a winter season where God is working below the ground in ways you can't see.

But the Bible is clear. The goal of Christian maturity isn't to do religious things. The goal of Christian maturity is to bear fruit. It's to be conformed to the image of Christ and reflect his character.

**And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate<sup>[a]</sup> the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)**

Only the Spirit can transform you. Only the Spirit can produce this fruit. Bearing fruit is the best indicator of your spiritual maturity.

So during this series here's a question I want you to think about and talk about with your friends and your small group. And I'll tell you right now, it's not an easy question. But if you're being honest, ask yourself and those who know you best: Are you becoming more loving, more joyful, more peaceful, more patient, more kind, more good, more faithful, more gentle, more self-controlled?

If so then praise God! If not, **How do you cultivate the fruit of the spirit in your life?**

According to Paul, there are two things you need to do. In verse 24, Paul says:

**Those who belong to Christ Jesus have *crucified the flesh with its passions and desires*. (v. 24)**

Paul says you need to crucify the flesh. Remember, the flesh isn't just your body craving carnal desires. The flesh is putting yourself in the centre.

Pastor Tim Keller calls the flesh a system of self-salvation. It's like an operating system for your life. You've heard of iOS – the iPhone Operating System, well this is F/OS – the Flesh Operating System. F/OS

is the default program you came loaded with when you were born. It manages all your applications and processes by telling you, *If you want to be loved, you need to prove yourself through your performance.*

How does that work? It takes a good thing in your life – it could be your work, your money, your family, your health, your looks, your reputation – it could be anything. But it takes that good thing and it puts it in the centre. Then it says, You need this! You will only be loved if you have this but if you don't – you're nothing!

For example, let's take your work. Work is a good thing but when your F/OS puts it in the centre you become a workaholic. You want to prove yourself. You work late, you neglect your friends and family, you do whatever it takes to move up.

So what happens? You burnout and those around you also pay the price. All because your F/OS created an inordinate desire for success.

Or let's take your need for approval. Human approval is a good thing but when your F/OS puts it in the centre you become obsessed with what people think. You become a people pleaser, you need people to like you.

So what happens? When people criticize you or reject you, you're not just disappointed. See it's normal to be hurt and disappointed, but when people's approval is at the centre and you don't get it, you're devastated. You're crushed. Why? Because your F/OS created an inordinate desire for approval.

Or let's take your family. Family is a good thing but when your F/OS puts it in the centre you become obsessed with your kids. You need them to be happy, you need them to be successful.

So what happens? You over-parent, you fill their schedule with activities. Your whole life revolves around them, you spend all your time and money on them. And then what happens? They get crushed by all the pressure. And when they don't succeed, you get angry! Why? Because your F/OS created an inordinate desire for your kids to be happy and successful.

What Flesh Operating System is running in your life?

- Maybe it's your desire to prove yourself at work.
- Maybe it's your desire for people to like you.
- Maybe it's your desire to impress others with your looks.
- Maybe it's your desire to have the perfect life and family.

Pastor Tim Keller says that your sinful nature doesn't just make you do bad things. It makes you take good things and make them into ultimate things. It turns them into idols.

And as long as these idols are at the centre, you will never grow in the fruit of the spirit.

So how do you get rid of these idols? You need to crucify your flesh. You need to shut down your F/OS. You need to ask yourself, What good thing have I turned into an ultimate thing? And then you need to put it in its proper place.

But how do you do that?

Paul says, **Those who *belong* to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (v. 24)**

The word *belong* is a covenant word. When God enters into a covenant relationship with his people, he says, You will be my people and I will be your God. You belong to me and I belong to you.

Belonging is where you get your significance and worth. Belonging is where you get your identity.

We think that after we've crucified our flesh, then we'll belong. Then God will love me. But is that what Paul says? No. He says the opposite.

He doesn't say if you crucify the flesh, *then* you'll belong. He says if you recognize that you belong, *then* you'll crucify the flesh. That's how you change. What is that? That's the gospel.

Every other religion says, if you change, then you'll have salvation. Only Christianity says, If you receive God's free gift of salvation, then you'll change.

How do you change? How do you cultivate the fruit of the spirit? **Recognize you are a beloved child of God.**

You define yourself not by your work, your possessions, your looks or by what people think of you. You define yourself by God's love for you. You make that the most important thing in your life.

Now I love being a dad to my two girls. When I was in high school, my favourite movie was Father of the Bride. I have a lot of great moments with my girls. When they were young, in the winter, I'd take them to school by pulling them in their little toboggan. In the summer, I'd put them in my bike trailer and we'd do a picnic in the park. As they grew older, I'd take them out for bubble tea and we'd talk about life and friends and faith. That's the kind of dad I want to be.

But during the pandemic, for many of us – things got really hard - at work, at school and at home go. Like you, I felt this as well. People tell me that they think I'm really gentle and patient. And that may be true – at least when I'm my best self.

But during the pandemic, I was not my best self. There were many times my patience ran out. There were many times my gentleness hit its limits. There were many times I was irritable, short-tempered and harsh. That person was not that dad I want to be.

See, there's a limit to your natural capacity. Because your natural capacity is rooted in your flesh – where you are at the centre and you have no power to change. But when you come to God and repent, he gives you supernatural power.

- You can love even when it's hard to love.
- You can have joy even when things are tough.
- You can have peace that passes understanding.
- You can suffer patiently without melting down.
- You can be kind to your enemies.
- You can do good without needing acknowledgement.
- You can be faithful and not easily swayed.
- You can have a strong hand with a gentle touch.

- And you can have self-control over your impulses and actions.

Now that's the kind of dad I want to be. That the kind of person I want to be. And I know it's the kind of person you want to be too.

God's plan is to change you from the inside out. Many of you have been trying to change yourself from the outside in. That's why you're frustrated, that's why you're defeated. Because it doesn't work.

But here's the good news. Jesus, the sinless son of God came into the world and loved us while we were still sinners. He suffered for us and died for us. And on the cross he defeated sin and death and in the process he destroyed your F/OS.

Now, you have a new heart; now you have a new operating system. But this operating system doesn't say, *You will be loved if you prove yourself with your performance.* This new operating system says, *You are a beloved child of God. And there's nothing you can do that can make God love you any more or any less.*

When you understand this, when you let it sink into your heart, when you let it define you – you will begin to change. God will give you new desires and new motivations. He'll give you a new power to live the life you were meant to live. And He'll produce his character in you and you will bear fruit.

As you do that, you will be a witness of God's loving character and his mission to restore the world.

Let's pray.