

## “Jesus Fruit”

### Galatians 5:1, 13-25

1 So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law. 13 For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve on another in love. 14 For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 15 But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.

16 So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. 17 The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. 18 But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, 21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. 22 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. There is no law against these things!

24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to His cross and crucified them there. 25 Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. 26 Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.

Fruit comes in *all* shapes and sizes. Well, maybe not all, but quite a few. Some are spherical — like oranges, blueberries and grapes. Others are oblong — like mangoes and papayas. Still others are apple- or banana-shaped like ... apples and bananas. Some farmers, though, are challenging our assumptions about the shape of fruit.

Watermelons, for example, no longer need to be the rounded oblong shape with which we are most familiar. Go to the right market, and you may find square watermelons grown by a botanical artist. At a restaurant, the cucumbers in your salad might appear heart-shaped rather than round, due to the produce shaping of another farmer. While amazing, forming produce into basic shapes like squares and hearts is just the beginning.

One agricultural virtuoso has developed a process where pears — having long been pear-shaped — can now arrive at your farmer's market in the shape of little Buddhas. The arms and facial features are so well-defined that the Buddha appears to be in a prayer-like, meditative state.

These fruits look like beautiful little sculptures or carvings, but no knives are used to create them. These pears are grown this way.

To grow square watermelons and Buddha-shaped pears, farmers use specially designed molds they attach to the fruit when it first appears. As the young fruit matures, it grows into the mold, taking on the shape of the inside of the tool.

When the fruit is ripe, the mold is removed. The fruit retains the shape of the mold, allowing the farmer to deliver a square watermelon, heart-shaped cucumber or Buddha-shaped pear to the market. (possible picture?) [NOTE 1]

With or without the mold, producing fruit is no easy task. Because of our distance from the farm or orchard, many of us have lost our appreciation for just how difficult this process is. We simply go to the local grocery store and pick up whatever fruit we like, sometimes, at a reasonable price. It's all right there before us and we can receive it instantly. Unfortunately, there's no market where we can acquire the fruit of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Wouldn't it be nice if there were somewhere that we could go to buy a little patience and a large size self-control? Instead, we need to become orchard keepers, cultivating these virtues within us.

Ordinary pears, watermelons and all other fruit we consume require a great deal of time and labor. Seeds are planted. Trees are pruned. Weeds are removed. Plants are watered. Pests are treated. Farmers take great care to ensure that the plants have all they need to produce beautiful, delicious fruit.

Then there's the waiting. Trees and plants take time to grow. Buds appear slowly, and fruit grows and matures over many days and nights. Successful growers need both hard work and patience to bring the fruit to market, whatever the shape. [NOTE 2]

We often would like the fruit of the Spirit *to appear instantaneously* in our lives, making us, for example, more joy-filled or generous people. Instead, receiving the fruit of the Spirit requires us to become more like the farmers, patiently working the soil of our lives to make the conditions right for the fruits of joy and love to grow within us.

*Patience* is a fruit of the Spirit: makes me think of a little 4-year-old boy who is traveling with his mother. Like most kids his age, he is constantly badgering his mother with the same question: "When are we going to get there? Are we there yet?"

Like many mothers of 4-year-olds, she gets irritated and says, "We still have 90 more miles to go. So don't ask me again when we're going to get there." \*\*The boy is silent for a long time. Then he asks, "Mom, will I still be 4 when we get there?"

As a farmer waters the plants, and is patient, we need to include times of spiritual refreshment like worship, Scripture reading, and prayer in our lives. Farmers prune, weed and treat pests. Likewise, we need to remove from our lives anything that is counter-productive to our growth as disciples of Jesus Christ. Like a farmer works the soil, we, too, need to get our hands dirty by serving our neighbors and friends, living as citizens of Heaven and God's Kingdom. [NOTE 3]

As an uncultivated or untended apple or peach tree might occasionally produce some fruit, we, too, might receive some of the fruit of the Spirit without much effort.

When cared for, though, those fruit trees can become far more productive, producing beautiful fruit more regularly. So, too, it is with us. We become growers of spiritual fruit as we participate in making the conditions right to allow the fruit of the Spirit to grow within us. We must then be diligent in *watering, weeding and working* in the orchard of our lives.

We do not do this work to earn the fruit though! Rather, we enter into this process to make the conditions right for God to produce the fruit in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

So you go to the grocery store. Where are you going to find fruit and vegetables? In the "Produce" section. Isn't that interesting? That moniker serves as a great reminder that we do not manufacture fruit, but instead receive it. The role of the farmer is to participate in a natural process. He does his best to provide a good growing environment and God allows the farmers land to yield produce.

One of the parts of the process that I found difficult growing up on my parent's 14 acre hobby farm was pruning. Pruning is a difficult process to understand. It looks so harsh to inexperienced gardeners. There were 15 Apple trees and a few pear trees on the 14 acres that I grew up on. We never experienced a bumper crop of apples until we learned how to prune the trees. And it felt ruthless the way my Dad told me to prune. I hated cutting off so many branches. But when I did the tree produced so many more apples? It was several years before I really started to understand how to prune. Fruit is not easy to produce! Fruit is hard to store, rots easily, rarely lasts. Amy and I are constantly trying to use bananas before they get too soft and ripe. Thank God for banana bread which gives us a use for the overripe bananas or we would throw a lot away.

There is a difference between producing fruit and bearing fruit. One is our way and the other is God's way. We try to produce fruit when only God can produce fruit by the power of the Holy Spirit if we let Him. God doesn't force us to produce fruit. He allows us to bear fruit if we turn to Him and plug into the resource of power that is the Holy Spirit!

Ideas have consequences and faith bears fruit. All forms of faith. One current faith is economic materialism: what matters most is money, and our meaning, as humans, is to earn, spend and consume. That particular faith has bitter fruit: disastrous economic inequality, deep disregard for the poor, disabled, or unborn, accompanying fear, anxiety, depression. Endless competition.

Another faith is the one I describe this way: that we are all heroes of our own stories. That meaning is found in pursuing our own interests. That all religious traditions are versions of each other, so meaning and morality are simply matters of choice. I go my way, you go yours. Isolated. Unmoored. Constantly pitting our own rights against those of others .... We often bear bad fruit. Lack of faith and trying to do things on our own causes us to be found lacking in fruit. And sometimes we produce bad fruit. But a good tree cannot bear bad fruit. So be a good tree by grace through faith, be filled with the Holy Spirit and you will bear good fruit!

--Carol Kuniholm, "Fruit that will last," blog posting of April 28, 2015. [christiancentury.org](http://christiancentury.org). Retrieved December 14, 2015.

We say a farmer grows fruit but technically, by no means, do farmers cause the fruit to grow. Instead, they make the conditions right to give the fruit the opportunity to grow. Then they get to collect what the earth produces.

The same is true in our spiritual lives. We cannot will ourselves to be, for example, more patient. There are no shortcuts, and that can be quite frustrating. Maybe you have prayed the prayer, "God, please grant me patience, and give it to me NOW!" While we cannot force patience or any other fruit of the Spirit to grow in us, we can make the conditions right that allow the Jesus fruit to mature in our lives. [NOTE 4]

In the movie *Evan Almighty*, God calls newly elected congressman Evan Baxter (played by Steve Carell) to build an ark in his suburban neighborhood. When Evan's wife Joan (Lauren Graham) becomes understandably confused and shaken by the odd behavior of her husband, she decides to take some time away to sort it out. On her way out of town, she and the children stop at a restaurant where God (Morgan Freeman) serves as their waiter. His nametag reads "Al Mighty." (I thought it was cute)

When the children are away from the table, the waiter/God engages Joan in conversation. He has noticed that she is troubled and asks if she is okay. She tells him about her husband and his ark, and asks for advice. What should she do with the challenge she has received of a husband who seems more than just a little crazy?

The waiter/God offers this beautiful thought. "If someone prays for patience, do you think God gives them patience? Or does he give them the *opportunity* to be patient?" The waiter continues, "If someone asked for their family to be closer," which is Joan's prayer throughout the movie, "do you think God zaps them with warm, fuzzy feelings? Or does he give them opportunities to love each other?"

While we would like the fruit of the Spirit to suddenly and miraculously appear in our lives, it doesn't work that way. To borrow the phrasing of the movie, these fruits aren't zapped into our lives. Rather, *we are given the opportunity to allow them to grow within us*. When we participate in the process, cultivating spiritual fruit by planting, watering, pruning, weeding and waiting, we make room for God to do wonderful work within us.

---We have been called to be fruitful -- not successful, not productive, not accomplished. Success comes from strength, stress, and human effort. Fruitfulness comes from vulnerability and the admission of our own weakness. --Henri J. M. Nouwen, Public address at Yale University, March 30, 1995.

But we are not called to produce just *any* fruit. We are to produce specific fruit. A Buddha-shaped pear is still a pear. Square slices of watermelon and heart-shaped slices of cucumbers taste no different from their regularly shaped brothers and sisters.

Jesus fruit, on the other hand, is fundamentally different from other fruit. "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" are not necessarily unique to Christianity.

- Want more self-control? There are 100's of diet books on the market with tips for that.
- Want to be more kind and loving? Many marriage and parenting seminars offer great advice.

- Want to be gentler? There are talks on YouTube teaching how to communicate more effectively with our coworkers, friends and others. Ways to cultivate gentleness.

While those things may be on the right track, they are not exactly the Jesus fruit the Bible has in mind. You will recall that farmers create square watermelons and Buddha-shaped pears by using molds that shape and restrict the growth of the fruit. The pear takes on the shape of the mold because it is not free to grow beyond it. While shaping the watermelon, the mold also **limits** how much it can grow. [NOTE 5]

***Jesus fruit, on the other hand, is the product of freedom, not restriction.*** Today's text is fundamentally about the freedom we have in Christ. Paul is so excited to talk about this freedom, that he awkwardly introduces the topic by telling us we have been set free for freedom. The repetition of the word *free* is used for emphasis. We are not just a little free. Instead, we are completely free and deeply blessed with the gift of that freedom. Paul wants us to know that we are not simply being squeezed into a law- or rule-shaped mold. Instead, we have been set free to be fundamentally different.

There is a common, cultural assumption that you and I are limited by circumstances beyond our control.

- A *psychologist* might tell us we are the products of our parents and limited by their emotional health.

- An *economist* might say we are products of our class, limited in our options by the wealth or poverty into which we were born.

- A *sociologist* might say we are products of our neighborhood or ethnicity, shaped and limited by cultural traditions and norms.

The Bible tells us instead that we are free from those forms, free from those molds. Christ has set us free ...for freedom. We don't have to be the same shape as all the other watermelons on the vine or all the other pears on the tree. We aren't limited by circumstances beyond our control. There are no forms around us restricting us, forcing us into some unnatural shape.

As the sons and daughters of God, redeemed and renewed by Jesus Christ, we have the freedom to be free. The freedom to be the good creatures God originally created human beings to be. We have been set free to become Jesus-shaped, to live Jesus-shaped lives. We are no longer slaves to sin, bound by the sin-form. [NOTE 6]

We participate in our freedom by becoming our own farmers, making the conditions right to allow God to produce the fruit of the Spirit in us. When he does, we get to live a life like no other. So spend time in prayer! Spend time reading your Bible! And come to church to worship and learn with fellow Christ-followers, a life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. A life of knowing who we are and whose we are, whom we belong to. Let us cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, that we might live Jesus-shaped lives.

You have been set free to break out of the mold and become the person Jesus has created you to be. Let us Pray ... AMEN

**Sermon Notes on “Jesus Fruit” based on Galatians 5:1, 13-25**  
**Given on May 31, 2026 at Doster Community Church**

- I. Producing fruit is no easy task whether we are talking food or spiritual fruit. We need to become orchard keepers cultivating the fruits of the Spirit (virtues) within us.
- II. We wish the “fruit of the Spirit” appeared instantly. But receiving the this fruit requires us to become more like the farmers patiently working the soil of our lives for the fruits to grow within us.
- III. We need to be watering, weeding, and working in the orchard of our lives through worship, Bible reading, and constant prayer! We don’t earn the fruit, we enter into the process to make the conditions right for God to produce the fruit in us.
- IV. We cannot will ourselves to be more patient or loving or gentle? God works through the Holy Spirit to give us the opportunity to allow fruits of the spirit to grow within us!
- V. Jesus fruit, is the product of freedom not restriction! We are not just a little free, we are completely free and deeply blessed. We are not to be squeezed into some rule-shaped mold! There are no forms restricting us or forming us into some unnatural shape.
- VI. We are free to become Jesus-shaped, to live Jesus-shaped lives in the power of the Holy Spirit. Please cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in your life. Pray that God will develop within you “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control!” What are you going to do about it?