

Series: Renewal; Cultivating Beauty from Brokenness

**Self-Control in a Culture of Self-Fulfillment**

Galatians 5:16-25

Sermon by Teaching Pastor Paul Joslin

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, July 28, 2024

A reading from Galatians 5:16 through 25: “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh, for the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want, but if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The acts of the flesh are obvious, sexual immorality, impurity, 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, 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. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit,” the word of the Lord.

Paul: Good morning. How is everyone? All right. There was a really good, “good morning,” and then there was like, nothing. Are we okay? All right. I am doing pretty well, and I am glad to be here with you today. We are wrapping up our series on renewal. Over the last ten weeks we’ve been examining how Christ and the Holy Spirit bring renewal into our lives out of the broken spaces in our lives, and so I am really excited to wrap up today with the fruit of the Spirit, self-control. As I was talking to someone, they walked in. They were like, “Is this the beginning or the end?” and I was like, “This is the end. We’re finishing with self-control. They were like, “Oh, that one is cool,” and I feel like we all have a relationship with self-control that looks a little bit like that. Many of us struggle with self-control. It is not an area of our lives that I think many of us boast about. Even if we have one area of our lives where we are like, “No, I have got that dialed in. I am really self-controlled,” there are probably other areas in our life where we are struggling, and so today we are going to talk about that, but before we get going with that too far, I just want to mention this one thing.

After service today, we have a baptism class for people in our congregation who may be interested in taking the next step of faith towards baptism and proclaiming their allegiance to Jesus, and if you have been with us through this series talking about renewal, and you feel like the Holy Spirit has been doing something in your life, you feel like you have been transformed, you are growing, and maybe you are seeing the Spirit more active in your life, I just want to encourage you that maybe one of the next places you could step into your journey of faith is getting baptized and declaring before God and the rest of our community that you want to follow Jesus more deeply and give your life to Him and proclaim that through the act of baptism. So, if you are interested in that at all, we are going to meet right after service at 11:30 a.m. You can go through those back doors back there. You get to go into the worship suite, where our worship team gathers and meets and talks through services, and we will talk through what it looks like to get baptized, because at the end of summer we have baptism at Bergen Lake. It is the pinnacle of our summer. Every year here at Waterstone we go across C-470, and there’s a lake. We are baptized. We have cupcakes and chocolate milk, and it is just a great celebration. It’s true. We do. They are really good, so you should come, check it out and invite your friends to come and see that as well. We would love for you to join us in that. All right, let’s pray and then we’re going to talk about self-control.

Holy Spirit, we invite you once more, God, to just to break through any distraction, God, any patterns or things we are struggling with, God, areas of our life where we are just longing for renewal. We pray once again that by the power of your Holy Spirit, you would meet us and counter us in this space today, and that as we wrap up this conversation about renewal and the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, God, I pray that for many of us, this sermon would not be the end of a journey, but just the beginning of a life of transformation and change and growth and renewal with you, and it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we pray this, amen.

So, the last one, we are ten weeks into this series, self-control in a culture of self-fulfillment. That is what I want to talk with you about this morning. I do not think that it is an accident at all that the apostle Paul puts self-control at the end of this list of the fruits of the Spirit. In many ways this idea of self-control culminates or wraps up and summarizes the entire conversation we have been having about the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, and so what you will notice today is as we are talking specifically about self-control, and actually many of the things we talk about today apply to our life with the Spirit and what it means to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, and one way that I want to capture that for us is I want us to go back to the very beginning of this series, ten weeks ago. Some of you have slept a lot since then. Some of you, like me, have barely slept at all, because you have a newborn baby or something else going on in your life. Ten weeks is a long time to remember, but ten weeks ago, we began this journey of the fruit of the Spirit, talking about this idea of the war within, and basically this idea of the war within is that every day, every single one of us faces a battle within our body, our mind, and our soul, where we are constantly at war, and this tension between two different sets of desires in our life, and the way that Paul describes this in Galatians five, is he says this, “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh, 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 you are not to do whatever you want.”

Now I will be honest with you. I think this is one of the most relatable passages in all of scripture, because I think when Paul says there are things that he knows he should not do, but he still desires to do them, and he knows there is this pull of the Holy Spirit to not do certain things or to do other things, that he lives in this tension, and I love the way he puts it in Romans chapter 7. He expands a little bit more on this idea, and I want you to keep in mind, Paul is one of the people who wrote about ten percent of the entire Bible and half of the New Testament, and what he says in Romans chapter seven is essentially this. He says, “I do not understand why I do what I do.” Does anyone ever relate to that? Yeah, right. Amen. He says, “I don’t get it. The things I want to do, the things I know that are good for me, the things that I know will help lead to the life I want, I just do not do those things, and then the things that I know I am not supposed to do, the things I know that I should not do, the things that are bad for me, those things, I just can’t stop doing those things,” and then he finishes by saying, “What a wretched person I am. Who will save me from myself?”

I think so many of us live in this tension, this war within, where we know what we are supposed to do, and we know the things in our life that we are not supposed to do, and the things that we are not supposed to do, we just can’t help but keep doing them sometimes, and the things that we know we are supposed to do, sometimes we might do them a little bit, but we can’t do them consistently enough, and we just live in this tension, this frustrating space, where it feels like we can’t get on top of our lives, and I don’t know what that looks like for you.

I mean, sometimes it’s funny. For me, it’s doughnuts. I know I shouldn’t eat a lot of donuts, but every time they are in the break room, and I walk past them, it’s like, “Oh, there is a doughnut there. I

should have one,” and by the end of the day, I have eaten five doughnuts, and what in the world is that? I just can’t get on top of it, but sometimes it goes a little deeper than that. You wake up in the morning, you are excited to go work, and you are ready to meet with your coworkers, and you think, “Today I am going to be so kind to that person in my workspace who drives me crazy,” and then you get to the end of the day, and you reflect back on your day, and you are like, “I was a jerk the entire time. What happened?” For some of us it comes up in this idea that I want to be gentle with my children today, and then we look back, and we are like, “Why was I so angry at them?” Sometimes it looks like, “I just do not want to look at pornography anymore. I want to be done with that struggle,” and we find ourselves scrolling through it one more time. There are so many places in our life where we can feel this pull to what we know is not what we are supposed to do. We know it is not good for us. The things that we know we are supposed to do, we just struggle to do them, and the things we know that we are not supposed to do, we can’t get over this, and the question is, what do we do with that? What do we do with this war, this tension within?

I would argue that our culture says that the way to conquer that struggle, that internal war, that lack of discipline, or the struggle with discipline, is the way of self-fulfillment, and it comes in our culture in a couple of different ways. Essentially, our culture says that if you are struggling in these areas, then the highest priority you need to have, the thing you need to live for above all else is yourself, your desires, your dreams, the things that you want to see happen in your life. Whatever you are trying to achieve, that will make your life happy, that is what you need to prioritize above everything else in your life. So, the priority list, the things that you are concerned with, everything you desire above everyone else, and if anyone gets in the way of that idea, you probably need to just cut them out of your life. If anything gets in the way of your happiness and your desires, you should probably just start removing those things and chase after what it is that you want.

There are a couple of ways that I think our culture tries to play this out, so we are going to do a little bit of cultural analysis. I think one of the ways this culture that believes in this idea of self-fulfillment tries to achieve a life of self-fulfillment is through this idea. It is whatever I desire, I deserve. In our culture, if you desire something, then that simply means that you should have that thing, that there is no reason to say no. There is no reason to deny yourself. There is no reason to feel guilty about the things that you are doing, because you have just been conditioned by society to feel that way anyway, and so if you really want something, if you desire something, if it makes you feel good, if it makes you feel happy, then man, just go for it. Just live it up, and it is this idea of self-fulfillment through self-indulgence.

I think it’s best summarized by a person who has gained a lot of attention and acclaim over the last few years in our culture, a guy by the name of Anthony Bourdain, and some of you know his story. He was a famous chef. He had different TV shows, and he had documentaries, and people have loved his approach to life, because he just had this deep appreciation for life and culture and food and all of the good things in life. That was his mantra, “How do we enjoy this world that we’re experiencing?” but one of the ways he summarized that one time was by this statement. He said, “Your body is not a temple. It is an amusement park, so just enjoy the ride,” and that was his ethos for life, that there is nothing really sacred about who you are. There is nothing that is transcendent. It is just all about fun and good times and living it up and leaning in, and that is so much of what our culture is. It is not about a temple or something higher than yourselves, and you are just an amusement park, and this world is a good ride, so just enjoy your time here. We chase after this idea of self-indulgence is self-fulfillment, because what you desire is what you deserve.

That is not the only way that we try to achieve this idea of self-fulfillment. Our culture also has a different message that almost feels antithetical to this idea of whatever you desire you deserve, and it is this idea of what you conceive, you can achieve. Now let me be really clear. That is a super cheesy way of summarizing that point, and nobody actually says this, but I was going for a rhyme, so maybe you can remember it a little bit more clearly. That is full disclosure, and it is this idea that if one path to self-fulfillment is self-indulgence, this is the way to self-fulfillment of self-control, and what our culture says is essentially this, it is all these self-help gurus. If you can just live your best life, if you can have the right morning routine and get to the gym enough, run enough, save enough money, get the right job, find the right balance between your job and vacation, then you will have the life you want, and you will be able to fix yourself. It is self-fulfillment through self-control, and it is no wonder that some of the bestsellers over the last twenty or so years have all been these self-help books.

I just went online this week to look at some of the titles for some of the best-selling self-help books, and I want to share them with you. Some of you are probably familiar with some of these titles. Book number one, “Atomic Habits,” and notice the language, “An easy and proven way to build good habits and break bad ones” Number two: “Get Good with Money; Ten Simple Steps to Becoming Financially Whole.” It is simple. “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: powerful lessons in personal change.” We all want personal change. Number four: “Burnout, the secret to unlocking the stress cycle.” Who does not want that? My personal favorite, number five: “Make your Bed; little things that can change your life and just maybe change the world.” I am not trying to disparage any of those titles. I am not saying that some of those books can’t be helpful. I think all of us are looking for things that can help us fix ourselves, that can help us get a little bit more control of our life, but I find it a little ironic, more than a little ironic, that there are literally thousands of people who have come up with the one secret that will save and fix you, and they are all trying to sell this idea of what it is you need to fix your story and your life, but that is what our culture says, that if you conceive it, if you have enough self-control, you can achieve the life that you are longing for and the life you want.

Here is the real issue. I think that sometimes the church co-ops and Christianity can step into places where we actually adopt this way of living into our own stories. We think that the faith journey and following Jesus is this idea of if I believe it, then I can achieve it, and we think things, it is just a slight twist on what our culture says, but it is essentially this. If you have enough discipline, if you do your quiet time enough, if you show up to church, if you do enough of the faith things, then you will be able to fix yourself. These are the sorts of believers, and I think we all fall into this category, so I am not throwing stones at anyone. I can fall into this category sometimes. It is this the type of Christian who creates the checklist, or maybe even when it comes to something like the fruit of the Spirit, they turn that into a to-do list, so if you want to be more loving, then you just need to buckle down, get enough self-control, and become more loving. If you are an anxious person, then man, you just need to pray more. If you feel a little depressed, then you are just not trusting God enough, and you need to figure out how you can trust God more. We turn this thing that is a fruit, something the Spirit produces in us, into a checklist, and here is the problem with that idea. I think it comes from this idea that some Christians have and that some people in our culture have about Christianity, that Christianity is about this: Jesus wants to come to make bad people good and good people better, and that is what we feel like the whole Christian journey is about, and so if I can just muster up enough self-control and enough strength and do enough of the faith stuff, then maybe as a bad person, I can become a good person, and then maybe if I try really hard, I can go from good to an even better person, and this is the way I think some of us live our life of faith.

We are hoping that if we just try hard enough, then maybe we will have the life that we were always intended to have, but here is the problem with all three of those approaches, none of it works. None of it works, and while you can maybe achieve some of the things you want, and having some of the desires you long for might produce some happiness, and even if you try harder in your faith, you might begin to see some results, eventually, all of those things run out.

Now I am not at all trying to make light of the situation, but the end of Anthony Bourdain's story is that he took his own life, because he lived all that there was to experience in this world, and it still left him in a place of hopelessness, and that is the end of this journey. All of these things that we think will produce life, if we just do enough, if we have enough self-control, if we just buckle down and make it happen, we think it will lead to the life we want, and then we get those things, and we realize, "I missed something along the way. I could not fix myself. I could not do enough stuff." The reason that it does not work, Paul gives us the answer in Galatians 5. He says this: "So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh, for the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. This is the war. They are in conflict with each other, so you are not to do whatever it is you want to do." Then he goes on in verse twenty, and he says, "The acts of the flesh are obvious, sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like," just in case he left anything out, "and I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will **not** inherit the kingdom of God."

What Paul is essentially saying, and it is such a weird list. It feels like it is all over the place. He is talking about drunkenness and orgies and witchcraft. He is just throwing it all together, but what he is essentially saying is, this is what the way of the flesh leads to. When we give in to our desires, when we think we can achieve whatever we want, when we have that sort of ambition, it leads to this end, and it is **not** the flourishing life we want. It leads to fracturing of relationships and communities and our own individual lives. The problem, Paul says, is that we have this thing inside of us called the flesh, and it is all of these desires, all of these wants, all of these dreams that have invaded our soul and our mind and our body, and they cause us to do things we know we should not do and keep us from doing the things we know we should do.

A few weeks back we talked about this idea of the flesh, and we used an image that I want to return to for a moment, the image of kudzu, the vine that has invaded the South, and if you remember, if you were not here, I will give you a brief overview. There was essentially this vine called kudzu that was introduced from Japan into the South sometime in the 1800s, and this vine essentially has just taken over the landscape. If you drive through a highway or a country road in the South, you will see this vine everywhere. It takes over everything, and there is really no way to eradicate it. We can't get enough cows or goats to eat it and stay on top of it. It grows over a foot a day, takes over, and here is the real problem. When it grows, it doesn't just grow and turn into this beautiful vine you see, but it kills everything beneath it. So, what you see there are actually the remains of trees that this vine has grown over, and it kills the grass and the whole ecosystem. The birds leave. The insects leave. Nothing can live, because everywhere kudzu grows, it just produces death, and it is such a perfect metaphor for the flesh, because what Paul essentially says is that there is something inside you that has invaded your mind and your soul and your body, and it is pulling you in these directions that are contrary to what the Spirit wants, and everywhere it grows, it looks beautiful. It looks like it will produce the life you want, and it is only producing death in its wake. That is what the flesh does.

There is something inside us that has invaded us and gives us impulses. The problem with living for your desires or your dreams or thinking you can achieve what you want is that you have kudzu living inside you, and it will constantly pull and kill and destroy everything you are trying to build. So, the question is, if we have this problem with the flesh, this is the base of this war within us, how do we live a life of self-control and I would say a life of the fruit of the Spirit in a culture of self-fulfillment and the culture that says, “Just chase after whatever you want. If you just try hard enough, you can achieve the life you are looking for”? How do we live a life of self-control and a life of the fruit of the Spirit in a culture of self-fulfillment?

Thankfully, Paul concludes this teaching on the fruit of the Spirit with two kinds of commands, and the first command he gives, he says the way of self-control is to crucify the flesh. As Paul closes out his teaching, he lists all the fruits of the Spirit, and the very next thing he says is that if we want to live in the Spirit, then we need to learn to crucify our flesh. If we want to become like Jesus and win the war within, we need to crucify the flesh. Verse 24: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires,” and I want you to catch this phrase. Paul is using incredibly strong language here. This is the very next verse out of the fruit of the Spirit. He lists things like love and joy and peace and patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, and all of these beautiful things that we all want, and he says, “against those kinds of things there is no law,” but if you want to have these things in your life, you need to be ruthless with the flesh inside of you, not simply say no to it, not simply push back against it. Kill it.

Crucify it in the strongest possible terms, but Paul also uses interesting language to say that this is actually what has already happened inside you. If you are a follower of Jesus, those who have followed Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh. What he is essentially saying is if you signed up to follow Jesus, if you have given your life to Him, if you have given your allegiance to Him, if you are following Him, He is your rabbi, and you are trying to live like Him, then you inherently have crucified your flesh when you made that decision. The flesh no longer has power over your life. It has been crucified. It does not mean that you will not struggle. It does not mean that you will not fail, but it means that the flesh does not have to win the war within.

I grew up as a child of the 90s, and in the 90s there was a big movement to try to help kids. It was the height of sex and drugs and violence, and so there was a big movement that was started to try to help teenagers overcome all of the temptation around sex and drugs and violence, and it was called the “Just Say No” program. Is anyone familiar with “Just Say No”? It was everywhere when I was growing up. It was on TV commercials. It was in our school assemblies. It was in all sorts of pamphlets that they passed around our school. It was such a well-funded program, and every year we would have these people come in, and they would essentially say, “If we could just educate kids and teach them all the dangers about sex and drugs and violence, and then teach them to just say no, then we will solve all of these issues of all this risky behavior.” So, I want you to pretend for a second that you are in a high school auditorium, and we are having the people come in, and I am going to give you a couple of scenarios, and then I want you to respond with the correct response of what you are supposed to do when someone asks you, let’s say, you are at a party, and they hand you a drink, and you are supposed to respond with, “no,” so good. All right, and then let’s say that you are on a date, and your boyfriend or your girlfriend is trying to pressure you to do something you know you do not want to do, you just say, “no.” Two for two. Awesome. You guys are doing great. You are killing this assembly.

Let's say another person comes up to you, and they start making jokes about your mom, and you want to punch them in the throat. What do you do? You punch them in the throat, right? No, I am just like, you do not do that. You just say no. That was the whole deal. It was the whole deal. It was like, "If we can just teach people to say no, then we will solve all of these problems." Here is the thing, after about twenty years of this program, the U.S. Surgeon General effectively just dismantled this program that they had spent millions of dollars on and how many hours and said it does not work. They tabled the entire program and said it does not work, and this is what one of them said when they made this decision to table this whole program. He said this, "The reason it does not work is that it does not go deep enough. Saying "no" is not something we do with our minds or our mouths. It is something we do with our hearts."

There is something about living in this war with the flesh where we think if we can just say no, if we can just get the right answers, if we just have the right knowledge, then maybe we can finally conquer things like the donuts in the break room, and what we realized and what research showed is not only does those programs not work, just saying no, just willing yourself to conquer that. What they actually found is that sometimes it had an adverse effect. They would go into schools and say, "Say no to sex and drugs and violence," and they would see an uptick in all of those behaviors after they left the schools. It was as if all the people were like, "Oh, wow, that actually sounds fun. Let's go try that," and there is this struggle that we have, that we think if we just willpower our way into the life with the Spirit, or the life we want, that we will have what we desire, and what we just realize is that human nature is like kudzu. It is not enough. We cannot conquer the flesh on our own, and so Paul says not to just say no, not to just push back against these desires. He says crucify them. Kill them. Do not let them get a foothold in your life.

I think one of the problems we sometimes have as Christians is we see that Paul says, crucify the flesh, and we live our lives as if it is mostly crucified. It is like that scene in *The Princess Bride*, Miracle Max, where he is not all dead. He is just mostly dead, and there is a huge difference between all dead and mostly dead, and many of us live life like the flesh has not been crucified. We live our life as if it still has power in our life, because it is simply mostly dead, and we absolutely still struggle and wrestle and fail, because the flesh is still inside of us, but Paul says it has been crucified. We do not have to live a life where it has power over us, that the Spirit inside of us is more powerful than the flesh inside of us.

I think sometimes we just live with this resignation that, "This is just what I struggle with. This is just the thing. This is just my flesh," and we excuse all sorts of things that happen in our life that Christ has actually told us you have the Spirit inside of you that is more powerful than the desires that are plaguing you, and so what would it look like for us to realize that the flesh has been crucified with him, that it's not just a matter of saying no? It is a matter of identity, that the flesh no longer wins in our lives.

I love the way John Mark Comer captures this idea. He says, "Following Jesus is about those moments when you have that decision to make between the flesh and the Spirit, and following Jesus is a thousand small deaths that lead to one massive life," a thousand small deaths that lead to one massive life. It is choosing the Spirit over the flesh, recognition that the Spirit is alive within us, which is really the second thing that Paul says in this passage. If we want to live a life of self-control, if we want to live a life of the fruit of the Spirit, not only do we crucify the flesh, but the second thing he says is that we live by the Spirit. That is the second thing he says, that as followers of Jesus, and central to this entire teaching about the fruit of the Spirit is that we are alive by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is what is cultivating life in us. Galatians 5:25 says this, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

Now throughout this series we have had this conversation back and forth about who cultivates the fruit in our lives. Is it the Spirit, or do we do it? Do we just work harder and try to be more loving and all of those things, or does the Spirit just do it, and we do not have anything to do with it? Again and again, we have come back to this idea, and Paul puts it perfectly in this verse, that it is both. It's absolutely both. The Spirit is at work, and we have a responsibility to stay in step with the Spirit, and Paul puts it this way, "We are alive by the Spirit." He just states this as a fact, that if you are a follower of Jesus, the Spirit is inside of you. The very presence of Jesus is alive in you, producing life in your life, and so when it comes to that struggle about what you want to do versus what you do not want to do, there is a Spirit inside you that is taking up residence in your life that empowers you to live like Jesus and become more like Him.

If there is one thing that I want you to hear from this series and I want you to take to heart, it's this. Jesus Christ did not come to make bad people good or good people better. Jesus Christ came to make dead people alive, and the Holy Spirit inside of you is not there to hopefully help you with some of your habits and give you outcomes that are a little bit better. It is not inside of you, the very presence of God is not inside of you so that you can just go from, "Yeah, I'm sort of a good person," to, "I feel really good about who I am." The Spirit of God is inside of you because you were once dead, and the Spirit of God has produced resurrection life in your story, and you no longer have to live according to the flesh. You can live according to the power of the Spirit, and we can become like Jesus, not just because we try hard enough, but because the Spirit is inside of us, bringing new life.

Paul actually hinges all of this teaching on this idea of since we are alive, since that is a fact, since the Spirit has brought life, then by the Spirit we march, and it is this militaristic idea that because we are alive, then we march according to the steps of the Spirit, and the image is that of a general who is keeping all of the soldiers in line, marching together. Remember the battle imagery. There is a war going on, and the way that we wage war is by staying in step with the Spirit, living life by the Spirit, trying to align ourselves with the will of the Spirit, and here is the thing, we can't do that on our own. If I came to you, and I said, "Hey, you need to become more like Jesus," and then I had you read the gospels, and then I just told you to go on your way and become more like Jesus, you couldn't do that, because let's face it. If I gave you a play of Shakespeare, and I had you read Hamlet or Romeo and Juliet, and then I said, "Now that you've read it, I want you to go and write a play like Shakespeare," you would laugh at me. No one can do that.

Modern context, if I showed you a video of Stephen Curry, one of the Golden State Warriors, greatest shooter of all time, and I said, "Hey, I want you to shoot a basketball like Stephen Curry. You have watched the video. Here is a basketball. Go do it," there's no way, no matter how hard you tried or how many hours you put into it, or how much you practice, that you could do any of those things, but if somehow the genius and the mind and the ethos of Shakespeare could come and dwell inside of you, or somehow Stephen Curry's DNA and his ability and his athleticism and his hand-eye coordination could come and dwell inside of you, suddenly it becomes a much more feasible task, because it is not just up to you and how hard you try. You have been empowered by the person who can actually do that thing, and that is what it is with the Spirit. We have been given the very presence of Jesus in our lives to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit, to help us become more like Jesus. It is not up to us. The genius of Jesus, the ethos of Jesus, the way that He was loving and joyful and peaceful and kind and patient and faithful, all of that infinite power that was within Jesus is within you if you are a follower of Jesus.



I think through some of the series, there may have been times where we have gotten to a particular fruit of the Spirit. We think, “I just, I am not quite there. I need to work a little harder. I am not super loving, and need to try just a little bit harder,” or “I am not a very patient person. I need to be a little more patient. I am definitely not a kind person. I need to be a little more kind, and I need to try harder in these areas,” and that is not at all the message of what the fruit of the Spirit is. The message of the fruit of the Spirit is that it is not about failing or trying. It is about the Spirit, who is producing life in us, and over time the fruit may grow slowly, but I promise you, if you look back on your life ten years ago, and you have been walking with the Spirit and staying in step with the Spirit, my guess is in this moment you might feel, “Yeah, I am just not a loving person like I want to be,” but if you compare who you are today to who you were then, you will see the fruit of the Spirit in your lives, because the Spirit is always producing fruit in our lives, and it is a matter of whether or not we are in step with Him.

John Scott was a faithful pastor and follower of Jesus for all of his life, and he said that every single day of his life he would pray this prayer in the morning when he woke up: “Heavenly Father, I pray this day I may live in your presence and please you more and more. Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you, and Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” It is said of John Stott that throughout his life, anyone who encountered him never met someone who was more like Christ. In fact, at the end of his life, as people shared stories about what he had done and how he had been at work in the world, the constant refrain was he was so much like Jesus. Why? Because he prayed for the fruit of the Spirit to ripen in his life, and God answered that prayer, and he began to ripen in those ways, and he resembled Jesus. So, may that be true of you and me and our community as we continue the faith journey, that the Holy Spirit would ripen the fruit of love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness in our lives, so that we can become more like Jesus and live for others.

As we close today, I am actually going to invite you to stand with me, and I would like for us to pray that prayer as a way of closing this series on the fruit of the Spirit together. Pray with me. Heavenly Father, I pray this day I may live in your presence and please you more and more. Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you. Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, amen.

38:48 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

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