

Natalie W. Ford-Cowling  
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*Fruits of the Spirit*  
*Galatians 5:16-26*

Researchers have discovered certain people are genetically destined to excel in athletics (and other researchers have concluded that I am not one of them). According to their studies, the A.C.E. gene is longer in athletes than in those who are not agile, fast, or well-coordinated in their movements. But, researchers also observed that people who are born with a longer A.C.E. must work out to take advantage of their hereditary advantage. (Greg Asimakoupoulos)

The Bible tells us that Christians are destined to have the fruits of the Spirit...  
 love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,  
 gentleness and self-control.

According to the Bible, Jesus gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit, living inside of us,  
 and this enables us to live differently.

Just like some people have a natural predisposition for athletics,

Christians have a natural predisposition for these fruits of the Spirit.

But like the Alka-Seltzer, we must be willing to let the Spirit  
 into every part of our lives.

***WHAT ARE THESE FRUITS?***

The fruits of the Spirit are gifts of God,

given to us when we are led by the Holy Spirit,

(Christ's presence inside of us).

The fruits of the Spirit are just that—fruits of the Spirit, not us.

In other words we don't create them,

we aren't in charge of them, we can't force them.

They are a by-product of the Spirit inside of us.

The fruits of the Spirit are a description of life with God,

Not a prescription for how to live.

We want to read it that way—as a 'to do list'

But You can't really tell someone to be patient

or kind or generous..

These are things that come from God within us—

not our own willpower.

These fruits of the Spirit are all characteristics of God  
 Character traits that we have inherited,  
 If we allow ourselves to be led by God.

***HOW DO WE GET THESE FRUITS?***

We have to check how we are living.  
 Paul says there are two ways we live—  
 either by the flesh or by the Spirit.

Some people take this to mean that the body and spirit are opposed to each other—  
 the body is bad, and the spirit is good.  
 But Paul is not saying this at all.  
 He is using the terms to refer to who's in control in our lives—  
 either us (the flesh)  
 or God (the Spirit).  
 True freedom and fruits come when God is in control.

***RIGHT HERE IS THE PROBLEM.***

*We want to be in control.*

Don't we?

It's hard to think about surrendering control of our lives to anyone or anything.  
 But the truth is that we are already surrendering control to  
 someone or something—it might be your job, your family,  
 your friends, your fears—the question is whether we want  
 to change that, and let God take the reigns.  
 What have you surrendered your life to?

We need to let go, and be dependent on Jesus,  
 because without God's help it's pretty hard to do the right thing.  
 Our own desires to make the right decisions,  
 our own morality only goes so far.

Paul is famous for teaching us that as much as we want to do what is right,  
 Most of the time we end up doing what's wrong.  
 Isn't that true?  
 It's hard to do what's right on our own.

But we really like to try.

This is another reason we don't experience the fruits of the Spirit.

***WE TRY TOO HARD***

Sometimes we like to just be given the rules and  
try our best to follow.

We prefer that our decisions be black and white—do this, don't do that.

The Galatians that Paul was writing to in this passage,  
they felt this way,  
they thought they could earn their way to God  
by following all the Old Testament laws to a tee,  
instead of striving for a relationship with Christ.

As humans, most of us want a ***MAP*** that says this way to Christian life—  
and instead we are asked to hold onto a ***person***—Jesus Christ.

We want to be told what to do, instead of simply following  
the only one who knows the way and can take us there.  
It's a harder road indeed,  
a life of prayer, surrender, and humility,  
instead of leading our own way in life.

Henri Nouwen put it this way, "I cannot continuously say no to this or no to that,  
unless there is something ten times more attractive to choose.

Saying no to my lust, my greed, my needs, and the world's powers  
takes an enormous amount of energy.

The only hope is to find something so obviously real and  
attractive that I can devote all my energies to saying yes to it."

Think about that for a minute.

He's saying it's almost impossible to just keep the rules in life—  
to avoid everything listed in the works of the flesh.

We have to have a goal, in our case a ***person***,  
who so grabs our attention that we spend all our energy  
saying yes to him,  
instead of no to everything that hurts us.

Have you ever thought about your life this way?

As saying yes to Jesus, instead of no to all the things that can harm you?

It's really just a different way of looking at goodness and behavior.

Is it more effective to be constantly told what NOT to do,  
or to be shown the way, and given a goal?

We have been *shown the way*—we are called to follow Jesus Christ.

We have been given a *goal*—these fruits of the Spirit.

But unlike the way we try to earn things at home or work or school,  
we don't earn these fruits—

they come to us when we follow Jesus Christ,

And allow our hearts to be ruled by the

Holy Spirit within us.

*But just exactly how do we let the Spirit lead us?*

We have to **GO TO GOD**—

sometimes again and again and again—and surrender our lives.

We have to **SPEND TIME WITH GOD**.

This means taking time for worship, prayer, bible study,

fellowship with other believers—

these are opportunities we have to surrender our hearts to God.

*I like what I read this week: Just as a child picks up traits ... by dwelling in the presence of her parent, so the Christian develops tenderheartedness, compassion, humility, forgiveness, joy, and hope ... by dwelling in the presence of God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son. And this means, to a very large extent, living in a community of serious believers.*

(Robert C. Roberts in The Reformed Journal)

When we take time for God, we develop the characteristics of God

But we need to spend more than time with God,

We have to **OBEY GOD**—

following the wisdom we find in worship, bible study,

prayer, and fellowship. We have to put our faith into action

If we don't go to God, spend time with God, and obey God

We may be like the farmer who was living in poverty,

all while living on a very valuable piece of property,

rich in untapped oil.

Once they tapped into that oil he was a very wealthy

man, but for years he was barely scraping by,

because he had no idea he was living  
on something so valuable.

Do we realize what is living inside of us?  
Do we understand what kind of power lies within us?

“Many Christians live in spiritual poverty.  
They are entitled to the gifts of the Holy Spirit and his energizing power,  
but they are not aware of their birthright”  
(Bill Bright, "How to Be Filled with the Spirit")

You may wonder—  
*how do we know the Holy Spirit is within us?*

The bible is very clear.

Those who follow Jesus Christ have the Spirit.

If you have confessed your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior,  
you have the Holy Spirit living within you.

You have the power to lead a life filled with the fruits of the Spirit.

If you haven't given your heart to Jesus yet, it's just a simple prayer away.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,  
generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

These are the fruits of the Spirit

These fill our hearts

When we give control to God.

We hear it a lot in church

Because it's so true—

Our lives are changed when we surrender them to God.

Friends, hear the **GOOD NEWS of the gospel:**

You can have these fruits of the Spirit in your life

If you allow God's Spirit to work inside of you.

If we 'unwrap' the Spirit in our lives

And allow it to fill every part of us.

May we let the Spirit work in us, Amen.