

WEEK 12 PREVIEW

The Fruit of the Spirit

"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!"—Galatians 5:22–23 (NLT)

It's always a little puzzling, if not troubling, when I hear Christians say, "I don't have that much self-control." "I don't have the patience for that." "I don't think I could ever love so-and-so." Red flags go up because they are not understanding the work of the Holy Spirit.

Living a Spirit-filled life is foremost about what the Holy Spirit does in us and through us. Galatians 5:22 says the Holy Spirit "produces" this kind of fruit in our lives. We don't produce it; He does.

Gardening illustrates the relationship we have with the Holy Spirit. A seed will only grow and produce fruit if certain conditions are met. The soil must be fertile and kept at the right temperature. The seed must receive adequate water and sun. When these requirements are satisfied, fruit is produced. If one or more of these dynamics is out of balance or missing, the harvest is compromised.

Similarly, in order for the Holy Spirit to produce fruit in us, we have to provide the right environment in our heart. To establish fertile grounds, we must start with regular Bible reading, faithful prayer, and Christian fellowship, and include praise and worship. It doesn't stop there, though. We can't just learn to speak "Christianese" and "do churchy things" and expect fruit. That's not the fertile environment the Holy Spirit requires or desires. Providing the right soil also requires relying on and remaining obedient to the Holy Spirit and His leading. When we offer our hearts with this kind of surrendered reliance on the Holy Spirit, He bears fruit . . . in abundance.

This good news is both liberating and exciting! Liberating as it frees us from the burden of producing fruit out of our own efforts. It's exciting because His work is immeasurably more productive, satisfying, and enriching than ours.

If the Holy Spirit is in control, then the fruit is infinite. When the Holy Spirit produces self-control in our lives, for instance, it's coming from a perfect and endless well, one that never runs dry and never leaves us thirsty.

This, too, is liberating and exciting. It's liberating because we are free to enjoy the fruit to the full without fear it will ever be depleted. It's exciting because this same fruit is a testimony to the power of God working in a personal relationship in the lives of His children.

Finally, Christians all have the same Holy Spirit and the same endless supply of the same fruit. One Christian doesn't have "more" of one fruit of the Spirit than another Christian. The Holy Spirit might produce more of one kind of fruit in us, depending on our needs, situations, and prayers. That fruit, however, is not an ability with which we are born. It is God working in us and through us to glorify Himself, not us.

Once again, we should feel liberated and excited. We are liberated from the compulsion to compare ourselves to others or wish we were born different or "better." We should be excited because we can be characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

When that happens, others see something different in us. They might not know what it is. They just know they want it. They will want the Holy Spirit and the fruit He bears in the lives of Christians.

When the Holy Spirit lives in and through them, they also will be liberated and excited—liberated from the same burdens that weigh us down and excited at the power He provides to lift us up.

The fruit of the Spirit is evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. When you live a Spirit-filled life, you *can* have the self-control you need. You *can* have the patience others deserve. You *can* exhibit the love God desires. When you are in tune with the Holy Spirit and follow in obedience, there's no limit to what He will do for your life . . . let alone your fitness.

Daily Spiritual Exercise: Focus on a Fruit

Each day this week, pick a different fruit of the Spirit to focus on and celebrate. Remember, these are not "fruits of ourselves." These are the outcomes of the Holy Spirit working in and through our lives.

As you focus on the fruit of the Spirit, pray for wisdom. You may need help in discerning whether you're working out of your efforts and gifts or allowing the Holy Spirit to work.

Hint: The less effort it takes for you to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, the more it's Him doing the work. If it feels like a total strain, it's probably you relying too much on yourself. When that happens and you're working out of your own strength, use the practice of spiritual breathing you learned in Week 5.

Also, pray for His strength. You'll need it to act on the wisdom He provides, as He nudges your heart in His perfect way.