

Equipped to be fruitful

What is your favourite fruit? Mine is definitely strawberries. Add a meringue coated in thick, heavy cream and you have a fantastic dessert. Calorie-laden, yes - but it tastes wonderful!

Among God's favourite fruit are the fruit of righteousness¹; the fruit of lips²; and the fruit of the Spirit³.

Several years ago, while reading Galatians 5:22-23, I came face to face with the character of God. In him there is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. He displays all of these characteristics to absolute perfection. Although we are far from perfect, as children of God we should reflect the family likeness and, in so doing, show an unbelieving world that belonging to God's family makes a difference to who we are and how we live.

The Bible teaches that when a person becomes a Christian believer, through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, he/she begins to have a living relationship with God. Jesus uses the picture of a vine and its branches to illustrate the sort of relationship his followers have with him - he is the vine, we are the branches.⁴ As long as we remain closely connected to Jesus Christ, by loving him and obeying what he says, then we're in a position to receive the power of his Holy Spirit in much the same way as a branch receives nourishment from the vine.

It's interesting to notice that the fruit of the Spirit is just this - the fruit of the Spirit. He is the one who produces the fruit in our lives. Our responsibility is to display this fruit as we learn to co-operate with him by remaining in loving, obedient relationship with the vine - Jesus Christ. We can't live a fruitful life on our own - we are totally dependent on the Spirit's power at work in us.

Galatians 5:22, 23 talks about the fruit - not fruits - of the Spirit. We can't pick and choose, so we can't take joy and leave self-control, for example. The fruit of the Spirit comes as a package. It's like a vine laden with grapes - many grapes are produced, but it's still one fruit.

So, what does it take to be fruitful? Here are some suggestions.

Good soil - we need to be in an environment that promotes spiritual growth. Are you in a church where you are consistently taught biblical truth? Do you meet regularly with like-minded Christians in order to have fellowship with them? If you are, continue hanging in there but, if not, consider what steps you could take to ensure you are rooted in good soil.

Nutrients - gardeners often add nutrients, even to good soil, in order to make sure the tree or plant continues to receive adequate nourishment. It's essential to nourish our spirit by regularly studying God's word and allowing it to change us more and more into the likeness of Jesus. Praying with an attitude of thankfulness, and making it a priority to obey his teachings are also necessary for nourishment.

Pruning - in the same way as a gardener prunes or cuts back branches from a favourite shrub or tree in order to encourage new growth, our loving heavenly Father takes care to prune us, too.⁵ Pruning, or disciplining, can be a painful process, but it's necessary if our lives are to be fruitful. I think it helps to remember that God's discipline is purposeful and that the pruning knife is in *his* hand. Be fruitful!

¹ Philippians 1:11

² Hebrews 13:5

³ Galatians 5:22-23

⁴ John 15:1-8

⁵ Hebrews 12:11; James 1:2-3; 1 Peter 1:6-7