



from the East Mercia Methodist Circuit

Session 2.2: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION: GOD AT WORK WITHIN US

In this session, we will think about how the Holy Spirit can be at work in our lives, transforming us by a living relationship with God, through knowing Jesus. St. Paul said: *“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, **are being transformed** into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”* (2 Cor 3:17-18).

Paul goes on to say that the Spirit brings out in us the qualities of **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.**

These qualities are what we call the ‘Fruit’.

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION (before you arrive)

Group leaders:

As a nice visual aid for this session, you might like to find nine different types of fruit (e.g. an apple, a grape, a tomato, etc.) and label each one with one of the nine qualities in the list above (***love, joy, peace, patience, etc...***). If it's easier, you could instead provide pictures of fruit, and label them with the same words.

Questions to ponder for all participants (before session):

Are there areas of your character you struggle with? Do you ever think, "I wish I was more... (kind, patient, something else)"?

Are you aware of things that are a 'work in progress', or where God is at work to transform you?

Are you perhaps more aware of your 'flaws' than those wonderfully good aspects of your personality? Why do you think this is?

A prayer to use at home:

Lord God,
Help me to know that you created me and love me.
You accept me as I am, and love me unconditionally.
Help me to know that your love for me comes first:
before any desire to change or develop me for the better.
Help me to remember that love keeps no record of wrongs,
that I am a child of God,
and that you desire only for us to be transformed in your love,
from one degree of glory to another, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

STARTING THE SESSION: FINDING OUR (F)ROOTS!

If there are fruits or words on the table, you might like to use these to help you.

Share with your group or just think by yourself:

Which of the 'fruit' do you most feel you need more of?

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

What 'fruit' do you think you have developed or grown most positively over a period of time? How did this come about?

A PRAYER

Loving God,

Take this moment, sign and space;
take my friends around;
here among us make the place
where your love is found.

Take the time to call my name,
take the time to mend
who I am and what I've been,
all I've failed to tend.

Take my talents, take my skills,
take what's yet to be;
let my life be yours, and yet,
let it still be me.

Amen.

READING THE SCRIPTURES

Saint Paul was convinced that people could change, with the help of God's Spirit. He had experienced it himself in his dramatic meeting with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, and after that when he found the Holy Spirit at work in his life, to both transform him as a person and equip him for God's work.

Paul believed that Christian faith was not meant to be a prison – based purely on the rules of a rigid God – but a way of life in all its fullness, in relationship with the living God who loves us. Paul was breaking away from what had been his traditional way of understanding God, which was legalistic and judgemental – even sometimes violent – and he was trying to follow the way of Christ.

Paul rejected forms of religion which tried to oppress or control people, and he tried to guide churches in ways of mutual love, harmony and good order, listening to God. (It is unfortunate that some of his writings, as we read them today, may seem to us a little bit controlling, oppressive, or demanding! This was not his intention!)

It is important to remember too that Paul was usually writing to churches that had emerged far away from the traditional Jewish homeland, where even the very idea of One Holy God was alien. Even in Jewish contexts, Christianity was up against fierce arguments and persecution. In other places, they were also up against all the prevailing distractions and easy temptations of the pagan world.

In this passage, Paul writes about what sort of behaviour is the way of the Spirit, and what is not.

Galatians 5: verses 13-26 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves [servants] to one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' ¹⁵ If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

¹⁶ Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

*²² By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,** ²³ **gentleness, and self-control.** There is no law against such things. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.*

DIGGING DEEPER

This passage is part of a letter written by St. Paul to a church in Galatia (in what is now Turkey). The church there was mixed. Some had been converted from the local pagan or imperial religions. For them, *freedom* as Christians would probably mean not having to engage in the local cults and superstitions, now finding new fellowship and peace with God. Others in the church were Jewish-Christians, who had now accepted that Jesus was the true Messiah. For them, *freedom* into this new way of Christ would mean leaving behind an old understanding of what God expects of God's people. For both sets of people, the idea of *freedom-in-Christ* would be hard to grasp.

When God sets us free, does that mean we're just free to do whatever we want? How do you understand this?

In the passage above, we can see that a reliance on the Spirit (rather than strictly keeping the letter of the law) should not simply lead to 'anything goes', but there are standards – based on the golden rules to love God and love our neighbour, and based the example of Christ – and there are ways of being and living that are contrary to the Spirit, and should not be acceptable in the Christian community.

How can we tell if something is not 'of the Spirit' or not acceptable in the Christian community? Do you ever feel that something is just not as it should be? What sort of things?

How can we graciously deal with these negative behaviours, while still showing the positive qualities or fruit?

What would you make of someone who told you they had all the answers (and their way of reading scripture was the right one) and yet their 'God' and their behaviour didn't show any of the fruit of the Spirit?

Can knowing the fruit of the Spirit help us to discern who or what is of God, and worth listening to? Try using these fruits to put matters

to the test. Ask yourself: 'Where is the love?' 'Where is the joy?' 'Where is the peace?', etc.

Paul was trying to encourage unity in the church, and to help the members see that fighting among themselves did not help anyone, and did little to further the kingdom of God. Instead, *how can we understand one another better, support one another, and even love one another?*

Growing in the Spirit is not an individual pursuit. In the church, if we know and love one another, and are honest to acknowledge our weaknesses, we can pray for one another, and even try to compensate and match our strengths to the roles we undertake.

Do you have someone you trust whom you can share with about your struggles? Will someone pray for you? Do you feel you share your growth and your struggles with your small group?

Fruit on a fruit tree is expected. It should not be a surprising gift. (We'll think about *gifts* next time.) Fruit comes if the tree is properly nurtured. Nurturing the Spirit within us over time WILL produce fruit. It may take time and prayer, but stick with it.

Finally, *which **one** of the fruit of the Spirit would you say is your strength?* Thank God for this – you are a blessing to the world.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT



PRAYING TOGETHER

- Ask God to be with you in this time together;
- Bring to God any prayers for members of the group, or for others you know who are in need, or in grief;
- Pray for those who are suffering in our world or community;
- Pray for the particular fruits expressed in this session, for you, for others, or for our church in general;
- Pray for the fruit of the Spirit to be seen more in the world around us;
- You might like to **say the Lord's Prayer**.

SUGGESTED SONGS TO LISTEN TO (or your own choice) – at home or in the group

Available on YouTube using the links below:



Fruit of the Spirit by Gareth Simmonds

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2-kRgrTnN8>

Fruit of the Spirit by Wesley Putnam

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7mH6IVkUSY>

Purify My Heart by Brian Doerkson / Kingsway Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKfuZVWr-8I>

COMING SOON in **GOOD SOIL**

Session 2.3: GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Session 2.4: GROWING IN PRAYER

Session 2.5: READING THE BIBLE

Session 2.6: HOLY COMMUNION