

If you plant a garden, one thing you will learn is how little control you have when it comes to making things grow. Sure, you can help the process in a variety of ways, but in the end, there is really nothing we can do to make fruit appear. The growth of fruit is not controlled by you, but by the patterns woven into creation by God Himself.

The Apostle Paul urged the Galatian Christians to “walk by the Spirit,” and he explained what he meant by using the phrase the “fruit of the Spirit.” The idea is not hard to understand: Paul is saying that if the Holy Spirit is present in a person, then the Spirit in that person will produce the fruit of right thoughts, attitudes, words and deeds. And just like in the created world, the growth is not controlled by you, but it is a process directed by God Himself. What fruit does God want to grow in you? Let’s look:

The first fruit listed is love. Love that proceeds from the Spirit of God finds its highest expression in self-sacrifice. “Greater love has no one than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,” Jesus said, and He also lived it. Godly love is a willing commitment to put the needs of others ahead of your own. Are you bearing the fruit of love?

Paul also mentions the fruit of joy. This is not simply happiness, but truly enjoyment of God and His gifts. Joy is being amazed at what God has done for you in Jesus Christ. For that reason, joy is not dependent on favorable circumstances. Joy is what the Christian still has, no matter what, even in the worst of circumstances. Are you bearing the fruit of joy?

The next fruit of the Spirit named is peace. We might settle for a definition of peace such as “the absence of conflict” or maybe just “quietness,” but peace rooted in the Holy Spirit means that a lasting truce has been called between you and God. The insurmountable debt incurred compounded by your sin has been paid off by the agony and death of Jesus on the cross. There is now no doubt about your identity: you are a baptized, adopted, forgiven child of God, and when you know who you are, you are whole. Are you bearing the fruit of peace?

Paul says that patience is also a fruit of the Spirit—but I’m afraid it’s fruit that nobody really wants. We live in a world in which “instant” almost isn’t even fast enough for us. And yet those walking in step with the Spirit will learn to accept God’s timing as the right timing. Are you bearing the fruit of patience?

Kindness is next, and while it seems like simple fruit, it also seems to be sorely lacking nearly everywhere you go. Kindness is being mindful that how we speak and the way we act matters—a lot. Kindness could be thought of as grace in action. Are you bearing the fruit of kindness?

Goodness is another fruit of the Spirit, and let's not confuse "goodness" with "being nice." In case you haven't noticed, it's not easy to be good or to do good. The opposite of good is evil, and being good will sometimes mean you have to confront evil and call it out, and that takes courage. Have you taken a stand for good lately? Are you bearing the fruit of goodness?

The Apostle Paul says that faithfulness is fruit produced by the Spirit, and it is a special and beautiful fruit. Faithfulness is not merely possessing faith, but it is the ongoing pattern of orienting your entire life around the Lord Jesus. Are you bearing the fruit of faithfulness?

The fruit of gentleness might be the most underrated quality on this list. Men, in particular, might hear "gentleness" and think "that sounds wimpy and weak." But Spirit-grown gentleness is actually strength under control. Once upon a time we had a 113 pound Newfoundland dog. He could knock just about anyone off their feet if he wanted to. But he knew not to, and he didn't. That's gentleness, and that's not a bad way to deal with people, either. Are you bearing the fruit of gentleness?

Finally, there's self-control. The Spirit grows in us the ability to say no to things that are bad for us and yes to things that are good and Godly. Self-control means you can say no to the devil's lies. Furthermore, you can say 'yes' to meeting God in His Word, 'yes' to His presence in your life and in worship, 'yes' to anything that is going to make that bond stronger. Are you bearing the fruit of self-control?

I love what Paul says next. After making this list of fruit, he says, "against such things there is no law." Isn't that great? There are plenty of laws against sinfulness, but you cannot be too loving. There is no restriction against being too joyful, or too filled with peace, or too patient. There is no penalty for being too kind, too faithful, too gentle, too self-controlled. God will only be pleased to produce this fruit in you and let you use it.

Now, an unfortunate by-product of this “fruit list” is that it does point out what we are not. At the end of each fruit, the question was asked, “Are you bearing it?” And you may have honestly answered, “no,” or “I don’t know,” or “not as much as I should.” If that’s the case—and it’s the case for me—just admit it. Do so knowing that your sins are forgiven, removed, and cancelled by Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross.

You may not realize all that the Holy Spirit is already doing in you. You may be bearing this fruit unconsciously. That’s how it is supposed to happen. After all, our tomatoes and apples don’t grow by our own willpower. Neither does the fruit of the Spirit appear in us by our own determination. It is His work in you that makes it happen. Just provide Him with the fertile soil of your heart, and let Him grow miraculous fruit in you.