

We have a mandarin tree that a friend gave us when we first came to Tauranga. It has sat growing very slowly for 10 years and then this year suddenly it has started to produce fruit. I wonder sometimes whether that might be like many of us and the Fruit of the Spirit, maybe they have been growing in secret and eventually they will burst out!

I want to conclude this series on the Holy Spirit by looking at the Fruit of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit are undeserved graces of God, that the newest of Christians might display. But the fruit, these are the things that grow in our lives over time, as we cultivate our relationship with God.

I want to resist preaching a sermon today that tell us that we need to work harder to achieve these characteristics in our lives. You see they are not called the achievement standards of the Holy Spirit, they are fruit. And fruit come from listening to the Spirit's hushed voice, from obeying the Spirit's gentle nudges, these things grow in us as we abide in God, in Jesus, in his Spirit

Let me recap.

God speaks our heart language through his Spirit. As Karl Barth talked about the Trinity as God the Revealer (Father), God the Revelation (Son) and God the Revealedness within us (Spirit). God reveals himself and the Holy Spirit translates God to us from within.

The Spirit is the Spirit of healing, of making all things whole and firm and strong again, physically, mentally, psychologically and spiritually.

The Spirit is a deposit of God within us, testifying to our spirit that we have been adopted by God.

The Spirit leads us into all truth, truth that has always been there but is being revealed in this era of the gospel. The truth that God's plan has always encompassed all people, and that we are always being drawn to expand our tent and invite new people to be followers of Christ.

Today the Fruit of the Spirit. These are very clearly nine characteristics that Paul felt were representative of who God is. So these are not goals for us to achieve, they are not targets, but they are descriptors of God and of what people who are infused with the life of God are like. Nine fruit. Let me suggest that you pick one in particular and focus on it and see if you might get a new insight. Which one do you pick?

Love: *God is love*, that is John the disciple's great cry. But what sort of love, what does the Bible mean when it talks about love.

The god's around Israel were believed to use people as their toys, but the Bible proclaims a God that loves us, with a deep concern for us, a self-less willingness to give of Himself. God's love can be seen in the first moment of creation – when God chose to no longer be all that ever was.

There are four words for love in Greek and Paul is using the strongest of these. *Storge*, is like the natural bond between a parent and a child, an affection, but also a love that is almost expected, the sort of love we feel entitled to. It's good, but God's love is greater.

Then there is *Philia* love, the love of friends, sometimes translated brotherly love, those who share common interests and values – it is not a reproductive love, it's a love freely chosen love – a bit like platonic love. It's good also, but God's love is greater.

Then of course there is *Eros* – romantic love, I don't mean raw sex drive, but that passionate love for a partner – a pair bond love for mutuality with spice, its good, but God's love is greater.

Paul uses the word Agape – this is the deepest selfless love, it does not require to be reciprocated, it just desires is the wellbeing of another.

How can we practice that love. We can ask God to allow us to see people as he does, to have him infuse that love into us. This the love that spurs God to leave the safety of heaven, to put on flesh and to risk rejection and then accept crucifixion for the sake of us. Mine, mine was the transgression, but thine the deadly pain, as Bernard of Clairvaux described it.

Joy: I love Mary; she's told she going to have a baby as a young unmarried mum and she is wow cool! Joy is just a bit more of that sunny composition, even in hard times. It comes from knowing God's got your back. I love the Magnificat; Mary's Song of Praise, it is very bolshie '*He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty.*' She's a revolutionary, Jesus' mum. We can have joy that comes from knowing that this world order obsessed with money, fame and power doesn't get the last word. When someone wrongs you that is not the last word. You don't practice joy, you find joy when you remember God has a plan. I think of joy like Damian McKenzie's smile when he visualises that ball going over the bar.

Peace: I didn't live through the Cuban missile crisis, but I did grow up in a world seriously considering destroying itself. And I think Kennedy's Christian faith truly did contribute to his desire to make a way with the Soviets; truly did contribute to his realisation that the missiles in Turkey also needed go. *When our ways please the Lord, we make even our enemies to be at peace with us.* Proverbs 16:7 *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* Romans 12:8. Practice make peace. Peace isn't appeasement, but it isn't conflagration either.

Patience. The longer I serve God the more I see his patience. When God asks something of me, and I hesitate, He just waits, an hour, a day, a month, a year. I remember learning that lesson at 14. I refused to apologise to someone and nothing happened in my Christian life until I climbed down off my pride. Anna waited to see the baby Jesus. When we experience how patient God is, patient like a rock, *I have set my face like flint*, Isaiah 50:7 it just starts to rub off on us. (Let's pause, can you think of a time that God showed you his patience that you had to wait for something?) I'm going to wait 60 whole seconds while you think.

Kindness: despite Jacinda's recent use of the word, I've often thought of this as a bit of a weak word in English. But for Paul behind this word was the Hebrew Word *chesed*, the loving kindness of God. This is how the scholar John Oswalt describes it

The word *chesed*...[is] the descriptor par excellence of God in the Old Testament. The word speaks of a completely undeserved kindness and generosity done by a person who is in a position of power. This was the Israelites' experience of God. He revealed himself to them when they were not looking for him, and he kept his covenant with them long after their persistent breaking of it had destroyed any reason for his continued keeping of it. ...Unlike humans, this deity was not fickle, undependable, self-serving, and grasping. Instead he was faithful, true, upright, and generous—always.

There is a lovely story of King David showing *chesed* to one of the sons of Jonathan, Miphiboseth had deformed feet, he was vulnerable and for his father's sake David showed him great kindness, returning to him his father's lands even giving him a place at David's own table. *chesed*.

Goodness: The end of the great Psalm 23, '*surely goodness and mercy*'. I love the idea of goodness, solid right through like a crisp apple, someone who has no guile in them, someone you have trust, someone who is just out to do the right thing, because it is the right thing. There is no secret motive or rotten core. Who do you know who is truly good?

Faithful: We often think of faithfulness in marriage, sticking not just with a decision, but with a person. Faithful includes that idea of having faith in someone, believing in someone. I like the way Paul writes in 2nd Timothy, *If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.* 2 Timothy 2:13. Isn't that beautiful? I found a story of faithfulness this week, Betty Harris lost her husband in the second world war, they weren't married long and because he was a pilot his record got lost. So she knew he was gone, but for 60 years she never got the story straight, she tried several times but failed. She stayed single, she said he was faithful to her all his life, and she would be faithful to him all her life. A bit crazy eh. Faithfulness is a bit crazy. Well after 68 years she finally managed to piece together the army records and found that Billy had been shot down over a small village in France, but then she discovered this amazing back story. Apparently when his plane was hit, Billy was headed for the village of Les Ventes and rather than bail out and risk crashing his plane into the village Billy stayed in his plane and crash landed in a field. He died, but others lived and every year in that village they remembered Billy's selfless act. And 60 years later Peggy visited that village and remembered the one to whom she has been faithful. Let's believe in each other folks because God believes in us.

Gentleness: A soft answer turns away wrath. It's one of the funny things about the Holy Spirit, the Spirit can be awesome and powerful, but also so gentle. The Spirit whispers to us and takes the broken one by the hand and leads them out. The Spirit wants to restore. I would so love to be gentler.

And finally **self-control**. An angel once visited a young husband with the surprising news that God had granted his prayers and that he was to be given absolute control over one other person, over what they said and did and how they did things. The young man was so excited until the angel told him that that one person was himself. We know the extremely damaging consequences when one person tries to control another, the horrors of domestic violence, but the final fruit of the Spirit is the ability to control our own actions. We know we can't do it ourselves. Paul says *'I do the thing I hate'*, but with the Fruit of Spirit growing in us, self-control grows, not like a steely glove, but like a gentle peace that grows within us and a desire not to control others but to be an instrument in the Lords Hands. The more we desire to be used on God, the more our self-control grows. Nine fruit. Which one did you pick?