

## ***“What Do You Want to Be Like When You Grow Up?”***

I've got to admit today that, now 5 weeks out from the tornado, I'm sort of struggle where to go with my messages. I don't want to ignore what happened, but I also want us to expand our scope of learning. I say that to let you know that I'm doing the best I know how to balance that right now. So give me some feedback via Facebook if you have some suggestions.

Today we're going to start a series of messages where we're going to focus on what the Apostle Paul called the fruit of the Spirit. But we're asking the question, "What do you want to be like when you grow up?" When you're 50, 60, 80, God-willing 90, what do you want to be like? Because the things we are doing today, are going to influence, and determine and what we're going to be like in the years to come.

The person I will be when people are bringing meals on wheels to me, in 40 or 50 years, is going to be shaped in a big way, by the person I'm trying to become now. The same is true with you. So what do you want to be like when you grow up? You see, when I grow up, I want to be like George Lassiter. George is a member here and a friend of mine. George is 92 and he's been working with me for years now trying to teach me how to grow tomatoes. This year we went out and had lunch, George drove. And after lunch we went by the greenhouse and he picked out plants for me. I got to say, I think this is the year, George!

But I want to be like George when I'm 92. He's not perfect, but over the years I've seen the qualities of greatness lived out in him. Integrity, joy, kindness, concern, compassion, the desire to keep learning and growing.

Now, the Apostle Paul describes this picture of what we might be like when we grow up and he calls it the fruit of the Spirit. It's found in Galatians 5:22-23. Here's what Paul writes, **“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).**

Paul is saying, "This is what you should be striving for in your life. Keep this in your mind as your goal. So that by the time you're 92, you've actually become this. Then let's work on it between now and then."

Paul calls these the fruit of the Spirit, which means that the Holy Spirit is the one who actually produces these things in us. But we play a part in becoming what we're meant to be. God intended that we be like this, having love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. But we play a big role in that.

Here's a quick metaphor. This is an orange grown in Florida. It's a piece of fruit. The amazing thing about this is that the orange grower doesn't produce oranges, right? Human beings can't make oranges. What we can do is plant the seeds that have the potential to become an orange tree. We work the soil and plant the seed. We fertilize it and water it. When it sprouts we tend it and cultivate it and nurture it. We prune it and protect it. We do this year after year, and we find ourselves harvesting hundreds of pounds of oranges. We do our part, God does his part.

When it comes to the fruit of the spirit, only the Holy Spirit can produce these things but we have to cultivate, nurture, fertilize, take care of these things. Over the next few weeks we're going to focus on what God is calling us to produce in our lives and our role, and the Holy Spirit's role, in becoming the people we were meant to be.

Now, as you look at what Paul lists here as the fruit of the Spirit, which one of those don't you want in your life? Which one *don't* you want in your life? I can't imagine anybody sitting here today going, "You know, Aaron, to be honest I don't want self-control. I pretty much like living a life of gluttony and debauchery and total self destruction because it's very productive for my family."

We want these things in our lives and God offers them to us. But some of you might be sitting there going, "If all of these nine things are available to me free, how come when I look at my life and I do a self-inventory these fruit of God's Spirit are absent? How come I'm not producing them in my life?" That's a good question. It leads us to the **PROBLEM**.

This comes from verse 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...” (Galatians 5:17).**

If you're not producing the fruit of God's Spirit there are a couple options. Maybe you have never invited God in. Jesus said, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (Revelation 3:20). Jesus isn't going to force his way in. He knocks at the door to your life, but you've got to open that door. If you don't see the fruit of the Spirit, it could be that

you've heard him knocking but have been too busy, or too afraid, or too distracted, or too proud to let him in. So therefore you're not producing the fruit of God's Spirit.

But if you're here today and you have believed and received God's Spirit then the Scripture says to us that there's a conflict going on. That many times our tendency is to satisfy our old sinful nature. It happens every day, all the time throughout the day.

Let's just talk about leaving church. You leave church, you're driving home. You see somebody on the side of the road distressed, hood up, they need help – you can tell. You can see it in the distance. Maybe you're at a stoplight and you can see it. Now you're faced with a situation. You could pull over and help. And in helping that person you could display all nine fruit of the Spirit right there in one stop. I can take God's route. Or what happens? All of a sudden my old sinful nature kicks in. You go, "I really don't want to stop. I'm hungry. I want to get to lunch." You begin to rationalize. "I'm in this lane over here and it might be dangerous for the people behind me. There's other people. A lot of people are letting out at Saint Paul's. Somebody will help that person." What do we do? We drive on. That's totally fictitious. It would never happen to anybody here. But the idea is an illustration of how God's route and our old sinful nature collide all the time every day. That's the problem.

There are other kinds of fruit that are reflected in our inner lives. They're what I would call the bitter fruit of the selfish spirit. Here's what the Bible has to say. Verse 19, "**Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these**" (Galatians 5:19-21).

Some of you listen to that and go, "You just described my family!" or "Those could be chapter headings in my autobiography!" or something like that. What I just read is a graphic image of what happens when I don't allow God's Spirit to control my life. When I don't allow God's Spirit to control my life you know what I'm capable of? I'm capable of some really ugly stuff.—things that I think, or say or do, or don't do. I am capable of some really ugly stuff. You're probably capable of some really ugly stuff too! That's why it so important to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit. Thankfully you and I don't have to live at this problem stage if we don't want to.

So let's move on to the PLAN. It's a great plan. It's God's plan. It's a plan for attraction. Verses 16 and 25 say, "**Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh... If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit**" (Galatians 5:16, 25). So there's the plan. What I want to do now is unpack that plan a little bit.

The first thing we can do to cultivate the fruits of the Spirit may seem superficial, but stick with me here. **Act as if God has given you these gifts.** Act as if God has already given you these fruits of his Spirit. Because if you have a relationship with God and he's filled you with his Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control are available to you. So what that means is that as I go through life, God has the power to produce love in my life that I've never felt before. What that means is God has the ability to bring joy into my life in the midst of a chaotic life. What that means is in the fast paced world that I live in with all these things and to-do lists and pressures and all this stuff that I feel, God's Spirit can give me a sense of peace in the midst of what I'm going through. Act as if. Let me illustrate what I mean.

Let's go right into your home. Let's imagine that there's a neighbor on your street that you don't like. I know it's fantasy – it would never happen. But that neighbor knows you go to Saint Paul's because you've got a window sticker on your car and you're wearing your Saint Paul's shirt.

You look at one of the fruit of the Spirit that says kindness. And you don't want to express kindness or especially goodness. Kindness is an expression of your goodness. But you don't feel that for your neighbor. So what I'm saying is you act as if you were kind. You don't follow what's natural. Because what's natural if I don't like a neighbor? What's natural is I want to drive on his lawn. I want to egg his house. I want to put a "For Sale" sign in his yard. I want to order pizza and have it delivered to him. I want to take an ad in the newspaper for a garage sale at his house. I want to fill up a bag of dog stuff and put it on his porch and light it on fire. Those are things that people have *told* me that they've thought about!

That's what comes natural. But I don't do what's natural. Instead I act as if I'm kind. I'm taking these steps. I'm acting as if I'm kind. I'm doing the possible and God's Spirit now does the impossible. With those acts He begins to mold me and shape me to where eventually it becomes a natural reflection of God's Spirit in me.

I often tell married couples that are having a hard time that one important step in getting the fire back into your marriage, getting the joy back, is to act as if that fire and that joy was there. Do the things you once did but have stopped doing, and you know what, that fire comes back.

Believe it or not, there are some people that I don't get along with, that I don't particularly like. But what I try to do when I'm around those people is act as if they're the most important person in the world at that moment. It doesn't always work, but here's what I've seen happen over the years is that I have actually begun to love some of those people and it was the acting as if part that opened doors for me to listen to them, to hear their stories, to work through my own issues and I am friends with people that at one time I never thought it possible to be friends with.

So where in your life do you need to act as if? Is it with your spouse, or a child, a boss, an employee? What does that mean? Maybe it means the next time they're in a room, you act as if you are displaying the fruit of the Spirit. Act as if, and God's Spirit within you will begin to mold you and shape you until you're able to display this fruit naturally as a product of the Holy Spirit in your life. This is really, really big. You display God's fruit and God does the impossible until it becomes natural. It's not about the other people. It's not about them. It's about your inner world.

While I'm acting as if God has given me these gifts, I ... **Believe that God will grow some amazing things.** Because if I don't believe that God will grow some amazing things, then acting as if just becomes is an *act*. It's just an act. But if I believe that while I'm taking these action steps, that God is at work, that empowers me to keep taking those steps. Believing keeps us connected to God. Believing opens up new ways to experience God.

Here's how Jesus put it in John 15: **"Jesus said, 'Remain in me and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine. And you cannot be fruitful apart from me. Yes, I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who remain in me and I in them will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing'" (John 15:4-5).** Jesus is God in human form and he's saying, I am the vine, you are the branches, I am the only source that is going to help you produce this fruit.

That makes me want to ask the question: What vine are you connected to? Are you connected to the vine of Christ here? Or are you connected to the vine of the world? Because no matter what, you're going to produce fruit being connected to one of those vines. No matter what. The question is what kind of fruit. If you're connected to the vine of the world you're going to produce bitter fruit that comes from your selfish old nature. Otherwise, you're going to produce fruit that comes from being connected to the Spirit of God.

So I'm acting as if God has given me these gifts. All the while believing that God is the only source for a true makeover. Then ultimately that I would... **Choose God's way at every encounter.** This is not easy. As a matter of fact, this is what it means to walk in the Spirit. It means that I'm choosing God's way at every encounter. The amazing thing about this is that we'll do this multiple times a day, every day, for the rest of our lives. That's what it means to mature in Christ. That it's not always this conscious decision every time. It just comes natural to you.

In order for the fruit of the Spirit to come naturally I want to challenge you to commit the fruit of God's Spirit to memory. So that if I say next week, "What is the fruit of God's Spirit?" You'll be able to say love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Why memorize it? If it's serving as a filter in my mind and it comes out in my vocabulary it can seep into my heart, my inner world, and then affect the choices that I make. But if I don't know it, I can't do anything with it. I realize coming to church and hearing me say memorize something, may make you think "That feels like church!"

But it's not that difficult. We have memorized all this useless information. When I think about my own mind, and all the useless stuff I have stored in there. It's scary! When I was a kid I memorized the McDonald's Big Mac jingle! "Two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a sesame seed bun." Twenty plus years later I can recall that! How many of you remember that jingle? A lot of you. Totally useless information. I have never ever used it and I have never forgotten it. But you know what, when I go to McDonald's I'm always tempted to get a Big Mac because that jingle is in my head and sometimes leads to action.

What I'm suggesting to you is that if you memorize God's word and it's in your head and it comes out in your vocabulary and seeps into your heart, it can leak into your actions when you're faced with the decisions you and I have to make every day of our lives. It's easier to choose God's way when you know what's available.

God says, "The fruit of the Spirit is a great picture of what you were meant to become. A picture of what you can grow into. Let's work together to get there. And I want to help you do that. Let me do the impossible and you just take the little steps of the possible and let's do this together."

Our goal in this series is to understand the fruit of the Spirit and be inspired to do our part in cultivating them. As we grow in our faith, the longer we're Christians, the more we're supposed to look like Paul's description in Galatians. So when we're 80 we're supposed to have more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control, than we did when we were 40, or 20. And we want that.

But it doesn't happen on accident. We fix our minds on this. We pray every day, "Lord, please help me to live out these characteristics. Help me to act as if, help me to believe, help me to choose your way when I'm bombarded with choices."

As we say, "That's what I want to be like when I grow up, and pray about it and invite the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, over time we see it happening.

Margery Williams book *The Velveteen Rabbit*, was written 1922 but it was kind of like the *Toy Story* movies. The Velveteen rabbit is a stuffed toy rabbit who is owned and loved by a little boy and that love begins to make the rabbit real. First he's real to the little boy, and then rabbit becomes real to itself and the other toys. At one point the velveteen rabbit is talking to the toy horse. The velveteen rabbit asks the horse, "Do you become real all at once or bit by bit?" That's a metaphor for becoming fully alive, for becoming authentically human, what you were created to be. Does it happen bit by bit or all at once. The horse says, "It doesn't happen all at once. You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in your joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

This life long journey for you and me is called sanctification in the Christian faith. And the older you get the more you're meant to look like what Paul is describing. And the decisions you make today are determining whether or not you will reach that point. And the God, the Holy Spirit, wants to produce these amazing things, if only you will allow him to produce them.

What do you want to be like when you grow up? When your hair is all loved off, and your eyes aren't what they used to be, and you're shabby and loose in the joints? I want to look like what Paul describes and have an abundance of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

Next week we'll start looking at these characteristics more specifically and what we do to nurture them. For today, that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Life wins. Amen.

*I thank Doug Fields, the Director of Student Ministries at Saddleback Church, and Adam Hamilton, Senior Pastor of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, for their resources in this message.*