

“By Their Fruit . . .”



SABBATH—DECEMBER 26

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON: Luke 13:7–9; John 11:4; John 12:28; John 15:1–10; 2 Timothy 3:5.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘You can tell each tree by its fruit’ ” (Matthew 7:20, NlrV).

ONE OF THE MOST THRILLING PROMISES of the Lord is if we will abide¹ in Him and let Him abide in us through His Spirit, we really will be different. Our lives will be greatly changed.

“Anyone who believes in Christ is a new creation [person]. The old is gone! The new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17, NlrV).

This quarter we will study the fruit of the Spirit. The wonderful plan of salvation promises us that “we all display [show] the Lord’s glory.² We are being changed to become more like him so that we have more and more glory. And the glory comes from the Lord, who is the Holy Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18, NlrV).

Those who abide in Jesus always will have fruit of the Spirit. Do you sometimes wonder if that promise really could be for you? The answer is a big Yes. We can believe that Jesus who has begun this good work in us will finish it (Philippians 1:6). Remember His words: “ ‘You did not choose me. Instead, I chose you. I appointed³ you to go and bear fruit. It is fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you anything you ask for in my name’ ” (John 15:16, NlrV). And the best news yet is that the good work the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives is not just for now but for eternity.⁴

1. abide—to live in, or remain with, Jesus.

2. glory—great beauty, power, and royal perfection.

3. appointed—chose.

4. eternity—forever; for all time.

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 27**“ ‘YOU CAN TELL EACH TREE BY THE KIND OF FRUIT IT BEARS’ ”
(Luke 6:44, NlrV)**

Has anyone ever asked you if you have received the Holy Spirit? This question is a way of finding out if you speak in “tongues” or not. For some, speaking in tongues means you have the gift of the Holy Spirit. But Jesus warns us that signs and miracles⁵ are not proof of anything. Read His clear warning in Matthew 7:21–23 (read also Revelation 16:14). Jesus says clearly miracles will be done in Jesus’ name. But that does not prove these people are Jesus’ faithful followers.

In fact, we are told in the last days false followers of Jesus will act as if they are serving God, but they will be doing so without the Holy Spirit’s power (2 Timothy 3:5).

How is the truth of 2 Timothy 3:5 shown today?

“ ‘A good tree doesn’t [does not] bear bad fruit. And a bad tree doesn’t [does not] bear good fruit. You can tell each tree by the kind of fruit it bears. People do not pick figs from thorns. And they don’t [do not] pick grapes from bushes’ ” (Luke 6:43, 44, NlrV).

Jesus said we can know a tree by the fruit it grows. A person shows

himself or herself not by what he or she claims to be but by what he or she is. The gifts of the Spirit are given to the church for ministry (work done for God). The fruit of the Spirit is given to the child of God so his or her life might be changed.



Jesus said we can know a tree by the fruit it grows.

Being a true Christian and having good fruit shows who a person really is. A good actor can play the part of Mahatma Gandhi,⁶ but he can never be Mahatma Gandhi. We can seem good, or even appear to do good. But if the Holy Spirit does not give us a new heart, we never can be good.

Think deeply about the difference between doing good and being good. First, what do we mean by “good”? Second, can a person do good and not be good? Or can a person be good and not do good? Work through your answers and bring them to class on Sabbath.

5. miracles—extraordinary (amazing; great) events believed to be a sign of the power of God. Examples of miracles are Peter’s walking on water and Jesus’ raising Lazarus from the dead.

6. Mahatma Gandhi—a famous leader of India who taught that successful rebellion (war) could be achieved (done) through peaceful methods (ways). He was assassinated (murdered) shortly after he helped India win its freedom from Great Britain.



The fruit of the Spirit is given to a child of God so that his or her life might be changed.

MONDAY—DECEMBER 28

“ ‘YOU CAN’T [CANNOT] DO ANYTHING WITHOUT ME’ ”
(John 15:5, NlrV)

Two young boys were using a fruit tree to climb out of their second-story bedroom window to go swimming without asking their parents. One day they heard their father say he was going to cut the tree down because it was dead. The boys were afraid they would lose their escape route. So they went to the store and bought some fake apples that seemed real but were not. Then they tied these apples to the branches of the dead tree. The next morning their father was surprised to find that apples seemed to have grown overnight on a pear tree!

Read John 15:1–5 and answer the following questions:

Jesus said He was the True Vine. Why do you think He said “true”? (Read also Matthew 24:24.)

According to John 15:5, what does Jesus say we are? What does that mean to us as Christians? What does it tell us about how we should live?

Verse 4 explains a branch cannot have fruit if it is not connected to the vine. This is an important point we should not miss.

Picture a branch that has fallen off an apple tree. Suppose that branch had several apples that were just becoming ripe. What soon happens to the branch? To the apples? Would it make any difference if we painted the apples a deep red? Suppose we watered the branch or put fertilizer (plant food) on the ground around it? Would the branch grow more apples if we stuck the stem into the ground? Why is being connected to the trunk (the vine) important to the branch?



A branch cannot bear fruit if it is not connected to the vine.

How do you abide in Jesus? What does that mean? What would you have to change in your life to make this a daily experience? What practices and habits are you having that make it more difficult to remain with Him?

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 29

“ ‘IT BRINGS GLORY TO MY FATHER’ ” (John 15:8, NIV)

What does John 15:8 mean?

You probably have heard the saying, “It is possible to do the right thing for the wrong reason.” If this is true, is it possible to try to abide in Jesus for the wrong reason? Abiding in Jesus is not a way of reaching a goal. Rather it is a goal in itself. The result of abiding in Him will be that we grow fruit, not for our glory but for God’s glory. The fruit of the Spirit is not to make us appear good to others but to make the Father appear good.

Christ’s ministry included many miracles and good works. His work on earth had a strong purpose. What was that purpose? What does this purpose teach us our reasons for witnessing should be? (John 11:4; John 12:28).

Perhaps your church wants to find ways to bring the church closer to the nonmembers living near the church. And that is good. At the same time, we

need to be careful about what our purposes are. What is our greatest goal in this kind of work? Is it to glorify⁷ self or to glorify God? How can we learn to make a difference between the two? In many ways, it can be easy to mix these things, covering even the most selfish actions under the false front of “glorifying” God.



The result of abiding in Jesus will be that we will grow much fruit.

According to Matthew 5:16 and 1 Corinthians 10:31, how can we create goodwill and give the glory to our Father in heaven at the same time? Remember it is possible for us to create goodwill and leave the Father out by taking the credit for ourselves. Examine your own heart and ask yourself what are the real reasons for some of your actions. How might you be fooling yourself?

7. glorify—to praise, honor, respect, and exalt (to think of someone as great).

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 30

**“ ‘THEN IT WILL BEAR [HAVE]
EVEN MORE FRUIT’ ”
(John 15:2, NlrV)**

What is the “pruning⁸ method” in John 15:2 all about? How have you experienced it yourself? When that pruning method ended, in what ways were you different than you were before it began?

At the end of every season, the farmer goes back in the vineyard and prunes (cuts off) away most of the vine. But the farmer must be careful because next year’s crop depends on which parts remain. The key to pruning is the balance between the crop and vine. One is grown at the expense of the other. If you do not cut enough away, the following year’s growth will be weak, and the fruit will be poor. The skillful art is to find the right balance.

“God tests men to give them a chance to trust in a power above themselves. God does not think as man thinks. God often has to break up human connections and change the plans that we have made. We may think our plans are perfect, but God knows they are not. What we desire for our spiritual good may be different from the experience we must have in order to be a follower of Christ. . . .

“God tests us all along the way from earth to heaven. For this reason the road to heaven is called the narrow way. Character⁹ must be tested. If not, there would be many false Christians who would pretend to be religious until their desires, pride, and ambition were crossed. This weakness in them is why the Lord permits sharp trials and problems to come to them. Then their lack of true religion shows them to need the work of the Holy Spirit.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, page 266.

Have you ever had a problem that greatly tested your faith? It might be so bad that you wondered if you really even had faith. When you think back, what lessons should you have learned from that experience? Most important, did you learn from it?

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 31

**“ ‘ “IF IT BEARS [GROWS] FRUIT
NEXT YEAR, FINE!
IF NOT . . .” ’ ” (Luke 13:9, NlrV)**

Between 1730 and 1745, the American colonies from Maine to Georgia experienced a religious movement known as the Great Awakening. Jonathan Edwards was a leader in this religious movement. In July of 1741, Edwards preached a sermon entitled, “Sinners in the Hands of an

8. pruning—to cut off or cut back parts for better shape or more fruitful growth.

9. character—who someone is; all that a person does, feels, and thinks are what a person is made of; a person’s character is the sum of the choices he or she makes, such as a choice to be honest or to cheat.

Angry God.” For some people, the sermon became a symbol¹⁰ of the dark, cruel, and hell-bent outlook of many Christians. But this sermon did show the truth about the awful weight of sin. It also showed how a very holy God felt toward sin and how a day of judgment surely would come.

What balance does Jesus give in John 15:1–10 in connection with growing fruit?

Notice how Jesus said if we would abide (live, remain) in Him, we would bear much fruit. Bearing fruit is a sign of being saved by Him. If we abide in Him, by faith, God promises us salvation.¹¹ Salvation comes through Jesus’ righteousness (His perfect life), which is given to us. But at the same time, Jesus warns if we do not abide in Him, we will not bear fruit. Those who do not bear fruit will die and be thrown into the fire to be burned (read 2 Peter 3:9).

What is the lesson to be learned from the parable Jesus told in Luke 13:7–9?

The point is not salvation by bearing fruit. Being saved by our fruit would be just another example of salvation by works. We are not saved by bearing fruit. Our fruit shows we are saved in Jesus, through faith in Him. Bearing fruit is an example of salvation. Bearing fruit is not a method

of receiving salvation. It is important that we understand this difference. If not, we may become too proud of our “wonderful” fruit. Or we are going to give up because of growing what seems to be a very poor crop.

FRIDAY—JANUARY 1

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “‘By their fruits ye shall know them’ (Matthew 7:20, [KJV]), Jesus said. All the true followers of Christ bear fruit to His glory. Their lives show that a good work has been done in them by the Spirit of God. And their fruit shows holiness. Their lives are made holy and pure by Jesus, living within. Right actions are the unmistakable fruit of leading a godly life. And those who bear no fruit of this kind show that they have no experience in the things of God. They are not in the Vine. Jesus said, ‘Remain joined to me, and I will remain joined to you. No branch can bear [have] fruit by itself. It must remain joined to the vine. In the same way, you can’t [cannot] bear fruit unless you remain joined to me. I am the vine. You are the branches. If anyone remains joined to me, and I to him, he will bear a lot of fruit. You can’t [cannot] do anything without me.’ John 15:4, 5, [NirV].”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, page 329.

“Many may join themselves to the church but not to the Lord. In time they will show their true character.

10. symbol—an object, mark, sign, or person that stands for, or means the same thing as, another object, idea, or thing.

11. salvation—God’s plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life; being saved.

‘Ye shall know them by their fruits.’ Matthew 7:16, [KJV]. The prized fruit of being godly, pure, patient, kind, loving, and merciful does not show up in their lives. They show only thorns and weeds. God is not honored in front of the world by all people who do not practice their beliefs.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, page 90.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① As a class, go over your answer to Sunday’s question. What is the difference between “being” good and “doing” good?

② Read carefully what Ellen G. White wrote about all those who join themselves to the church but not to the Lord. Soon they will show their true character. What does that mean?

Why should we each ask ourselves which group we truly belong to? How can we know the answer for sure?

③ Compare two persons: One is a Seventh-day Adventist who knows and believes all the doctrines—the state of the dead, the Second Coming, 1844, and so on. But this person is mean, harsh, judgmental, and unloving. Now there is another person who claims to have faith in Christ but has rejected all these teachings. He has accepted doctrinal errors. But this person is kind, forgiving, loving, and nonjudgmental. He is everything that the Adventist is not. Of course, we do not know hearts. But suppose if you had to guess which one was closer to the kingdom of God, whom would you choose? Why? What does your answer suggest about what you think is important in Christianity?