

# “By Their Fruit . . .”



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Luke 13:7–9, John 11:4, 12:28, 15:1–10, 2 Tim. 3:5.*

**Memory Text:** “‘Therefore by their fruits you will know them’ ”  
(*Matthew 7:20, NKJV*).

One of the most thrilling promises of the Lord is that if we will abide in Him and allow Him to abide in us through His Spirit, we actually will be different. Our lives will be changed, even radically.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (*2 Cor. 5:17, NKJV*).

This quarter we will study various facets of the fruit of the Spirit. The wonderful plan of salvation assures us that “we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (*2 Cor. 3:18, NKJV*).

Those who abide in Jesus always will bear fruit of the Spirit. Do you sometimes wonder if that promise really could be for you? The answer is a resounding Yes. We can be confident of this very thing, that He who has begun this good work in us will finish it (*Phil. 1:6*). Remember His words: “ ‘You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you’ ” (*John 15:16, NKJV*). 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.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 2.*

## “ ‘Every Tree Is Known by Its Own Fruit’ ”

*(Luke 6:44, NKJV)*

Has anyone ever asked you if you have received the Holy Spirit? Usually this is a way of discovering whether you speak in “tongues.” For them, tongues-speaking is the determining factor for whether or not you demonstrate the indwelling of the Spirit. Jesus, though, warns us about looking at certain outward signs and miracles as proof of anything. Read His clear warning in Matthew 7:21–23 (*see also Rev. 16:14*). Jesus says plainly that undeniable miracles will be performed in Jesus’ name, but that does not prove that these people are His faithful followers.

In fact, we are told that in the last days professed followers of Jesus would have a form of godliness but would deny the power thereof (*2 Tim. 3:5*).

### **Read 2 Timothy 3:5. How do we see this truth manifested today?**

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“ ‘For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush’ ” (*Luke 6:43, 44, NKJV*).

Jesus said we can know a tree by the fruit it produces. A person reveals himself or herself not so much by what he or she professes but by what he or she is. The gifts of the Spirit are given to the church for ministry. The fruit of the Spirit is given to the child of God so that his or her life might be changed.

Being a true Christian and bearing good fruit place the emphasis on being. A good actor can play the part of Mahatma Gandhi, but he can never be Mahatma Gandhi. We can look good, sound good, and even appear to do good. But unless the Holy Spirit gives us a new heart, we never can be good.

**Dwell more on this distinction 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.**

## The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Matthew 7:20, NIV*

▶ **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand that growth in the Christian life is a process.

**Feel:** Experience confidence in the Holy Spirit, not self.

**Do:** Choose to engage fully in the process of spiritual growth, aided by God's Spirit.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

### I. Know: Jesus, the True Vine, the Only Means of Growth

**A** John 15:5 teaches that there is no growth apart from Jesus. How do we become a branch of the Vine? Why is pruning painful but an essential part of the growth process?

**B** What is the relationship between personal growth and discipleship? (Note: A disciple is a lifelong learner.)

**C** Stagnation means ruin and death. What causes stagnation in the Christian life?

### II. Feel: Confidence in the Holy Spirit

**A** How does looking away from self to Jesus create an ongoing confidence in the work of the Holy Spirit?

### III. Do: Fertilizing the Soul

**A** Why do we grow? What is the purpose in our honoring God? How do we become more mature in our Christian life?

**B** What is the greatest cause of stagnation and decay in the Christian experience? (*See Heb. 2:3.*)

**C** In what ways do prayer, meditation, witnessing to others, studying God's Word, thinking, and memorizing Scripture work positively in our lives to promote growth?

**D** How do we evaluate growth?

▶ **Summary:** Growth in the Christian experience takes time. Neglecting the means of growth brings stagnation and eventually ruin. Looking away from self to Jesus gives encouragement and confidence.

**“ ‘Without Me You Can Do Nothing’ ”**  
*(John 15:5, NKJV)*

Two young boys were using a fruit tree to climb out of their second-story bedroom window and go to the swimming hole without their parents' permission. One day they heard their father say he was going to cut the tree down because it was dead. Fearing they would lose their escape route, they went to the store and bought artificial apples, which they tied to the branches of the dead tree. The next morning their father expressed amazement that apples seemed to have grown overnight, especially since the tree was a pear tree!

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

**Jesus declared Himself to be the True Vine. Why do you think He emphasized “true” vine?** *(See also Matt. 24:24.)*

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**According to John 15:5, what does Jesus say we are? What does that mean on a practical level; that is, what does it tell us about how we should live?**

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Verse 4 explains that a branch cannot bear fruit unless it is connected to the vine. This is a crucial point, one that we should not miss.

Picture a branch that has fallen off an apple tree. Suppose that branch had several apples just reaching maturity. 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 on the ground around it? Would the branch continue to bear more apples if we stuck the stem into the ground? Why, then, is being connected to the trunk (the vine) essential to the branch?

**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 cultivating that make it more difficult to abide in Him?**

## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1**—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** **The fruit of the Spirit in a Christian’s life is a result of God’s direct action and the Christian’s surrender to His will.**

What results if one takes the seeds from a Red Delicious apple, puts them in the ground or in a pot, and successfully brings a plant to maturity? You have a Red Delicious apple tree, right? No. Red Delicious apples—as well as many other familiar varieties of fruit—are what are known as cultivars. Cultivars are among the earliest products of human tampering with nature. Some cultivars are merely the product of the selective growing of desired seeds or plant tissue found in the wild. Others—the Red Delicious apple, for example—are strictly engineered products, created by grafting or by the use of cuttings from existing plants. One cannot grow them from seeds.

In the same way, the fruit of the Spirit is a cultivar. A person will not miraculously be born and grow to maturity manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. Like the fruit we see in any market, the fruit of the Spirit is not self-originating. God must graft it onto each individual. But here is where the metaphor breaks down: we have an active role in the process. We must surrender to God and allow Him to grow the fruit of the Spirit in us.

**Consider This:** The first apples found growing in the wild probably were tiny and sour. It took some imaginative agriculturalist to see their potential and to work with them until they were edible and eventually palatable. What might this tell us about what we are and what God sees that we can be?

■ *Why are even our best intentions insufficient to enable us to produce good fruit, or at least “good enough” fruit?*

### ► **STEP 2**—Explore

## Bible Commentary

**I. A Harvest of Bad Fruit and No Fruit** (Review Matthew 21:10–21, Mark 11:11–22, Jude 1:12 with your class.)

Bad fruit or no fruit is what one can expect from those who’ve had no

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## “ ‘By This My Father Is Glorified’ ”

*(John 15:8, NKJV)*

“ ‘By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples’ ” *(John 15:8, NKJV)*. What does this text mean?

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You have no doubt heard the saying, “It is possible to do the right thing for the wrong reason.” If this is true, is it possible to attempt to abide in Jesus for the wrong reason? Abiding in Jesus is not a means to an end; rather, it is an end in itself. The result of abiding in Him will be that we bear fruit, not to glorify ourselves but to glorify God. In other words, the fruit of the Spirit is not to make us look good but to make the Father look good.

**Christ’s** ministry, which included many miracles and good works, had a definite driving force. What was that force, and how should this idea influence what our motives should be? *John 11:4, 12:28.*

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Perhaps your church is looking for ways to do things in the community that will enhance the image of the church. And that’s good. At the same time, we need to be careful about what our motives and purposes are. What’s our ultimate goal in these endeavors? Is it to glorify self or to glorify God? How can we learn to make a distinction between the two? In many ways, it can be easy to mix these things, covering even the most self-aggrandizing actions under the false veneer of “glorifying” God.

**Read Matthew 5:16 and 1 Corinthians 10:31. How can we create good will and give the glory to our Father in heaven at the same time? Bear in mind that it is possible to create good will and leave the Father out, taking the credit for ourselves. Examine your own heart and ask yourself what really motivates some of your actions. How might you be fooling yourself?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

experience of, or teaching about, God. The absence of fruit becomes an issue when it appears among those who do have this experience and knowledge. The fig tree in the parallel passages of Mark and Luke usually has been taken to symbolize the Jewish nation, which had the outward trappings of being religious and God-fearing but was in reality too insular and obsessed with externals (the showy leaves of the fig tree) to have much impact on the world around it. Jesus held out hope for those who produced bad fruit (they could someday produce good fruit) or those who had not yet had the opportunity to produce fruit; but His response to the barren but visually appealing fig tree was to curse it and cause it to wither. The withering was an outward sign—and warning—of the ultimate end of a life that bears no fruit: the second death.

Another example of this can be seen in the false teachers referred to in Jude 12 as “autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead” (*NIV*). As autumn trees, they had their opportunity to produce fruit and maybe even had produced fruit at one point. But for whatever reason, they stopped. They were teachers, but they were no longer teaching the right things. Instead, they were obsessed with how enlightened they were and were teaching others to be the same. They were twice dead because they had been dead in sin but now had returned to their former state of spiritual death.

From these passages we can gather that a failure to produce fruit is a sign, as is bad fruit, that the Holy Spirit doesn’t live within the heart.

**Consider This:** What do you think these passages mean when they refer to the absence of fruit? Which is better: to produce no fruit or to actively produce bad fruit? Consider the following verses: *Matthew 25:14–30*.

## II. Good Fruit (Review *John 15:1–10* with your class.)

As stated before, in the absence of God, human beings will produce bad fruit or no fruit at all. In *John 15:1–10*, Jesus explicitly compares God to an agriculturalist cultivating a vine, and the Vine is a symbol for Jesus Christ Himself. The Vine in turn provides vitality and nourishment to the branches and enables them to bear fruit. This Vine is not just any Vine; it is a good Vine, and the branches, provided they are attached to the Vine, produce good fruit. Not because they are ordered to produce good fruit or because they try very hard to produce good fruit, but because they are

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## “ ‘That It May Bear More Fruit’ ”

(John 15:2, NKJV)

“ ‘Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit’ ” (John 15:2, NKJV). **What is this pruning process all about? How have you experienced it yourself? When that specific process ended, in what ways were you different from before it began?**

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At the end of every season, the farmer goes back into the vineyard and prunes away most of the vine. The farmer must be careful, however, because next year’s crop is directly dependent 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 overcrop by not cutting enough away, the following year’s growth will be weak and the fruit inferior. The skillful art is to find the right balance.

“God brings men into trying places to see if they will trust in a power out of and above themselves. He sees not as man sees. He often has to break up human connections and change the order which man has mapped out, which is perfect in his estimation. What man thinks is for his spiritual and temporal interests may be altogether at variance with the experience he must have in order to be a follower of Christ. His idea of his own value may be far out of the way.

“Tests are placed all along the way from earth to heaven. It is because of this that the road to heaven is called the narrow way. Character must be tested, else there would be many spurious Christians who would keep up a fair semblance of religion until their inclinations, their desire to have their own way, their pride and ambition, were crossed. When by the Lord’s permission sharp trials come to them, their lack of genuine religion, of the meekness and lowliness of Christ, shows them to be in need of the work of the Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 266.

**Have you ever had a trial that severely tested your faith, even to the point where you wondered if you really even had faith? Looking back, what lessons should you have learned from that experience? Most important, did you learn them?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

good branches on a good Vine, and so the production of good fruit is the natural result of that connection.

Sometimes it happens that one of the branches becomes severed from the Vine or acquires a stray bit of wild pollen and produces bad fruit or no fruit. In such an instance, it must be grafted back into the good Vine and pruned so that it can produce good fruit again.

**Consider This:** John 15:2 discusses a pruning process for true disciples of Christ. What tests and pruning were awaiting the followers of Christ present at the time? What were its effects on them?

### ► STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Use these questions to help your students to understand the significance of the fruit of the Spirit as a result of and signifier for the Christian life.

#### Thought Questions:

- 1 Popular understanding of the fruit of the Spirit (and the gifts of the Spirit, as well) is that they are in some way “miraculous.” In reality, as Paul catalogs these gifts in Galatians 5:22, 23, they seem quite mundane. And yet, can they be said to be genuinely miraculous in a sense?
- 2 Is the fruit of the Spirit identical with good works? Why, or why not?
- 3 Why does God want us to bear the fruit spoken of in Galatians 5:22, 23? Is it for our own good in this life? Is it a way for us to prove our salvation? Does it help to make us more fit for ministry?
- 4 What is the nature of the relationship that allows God to grow the fruit of the Spirit within us? What does it mean for Jesus to abide in us or for us to abide in Him? (*See John 15:4–10.*)

#### Application Questions:

- 1 Second Timothy 3:5 says that in the last days there will be Christians who have a form of godliness but deny its power. It is tempting to assume this text applies to other people, especially if they are in other churches or denominations. But be honest: in what situations does this text ever apply

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“ ‘ “And If It Bears Fruit, Well. But If Not . . .” ’ ” (Luke 13:9, NKJV)

Between 1730 and 1745 the American colonies from Maine to Georgia experienced a religious revival known as the Great Awakening. Jonathan Edwards was a leader in this movement of spiritual renewal. In July of 1741 he preached a sermon entitled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” which, for some, has become a symbol of the bleak, cruel, and hell-bent outlook of many Christians. However polemical, this sermon did express the truth about the awful weight of sin, the attitude of an infinitely holy God toward sin, and the surety of a day of judgment.

**Read** John 15:1–10. What balance does Jesus present here in the context of bearing fruit?

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Notice how, on one hand, He said that if we would abide in Him we would bear much fruit, which is a product of being saved by Him. That is, if we abide in Him, by faith, we are assured of salvation because of His righteousness, which is credited to us. At the same time, He warns that if we do not abide in Him we will not bear fruit, and those who do not bear fruit will wither and at last be cast into the fire to be burned (*see 2 Pet. 3:9*).

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

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The point here is not salvation by bearing fruit, which would be just another manifestation of salvation by works. We’re not saved by bearing fruit; our fruit reveals the reality of the salvation we already have in Jesus, through faith in Him. Bearing fruit is an expression of salvation; it is not a means to attaining it. It is crucial that we understand this distinction. If not, sooner or later either we are going to become proud of what we deem our wonderful fruit, or we’re going to give up in despair at what seems to be a very paltry crop.

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Learning Cycle CONTINUED

to the church and to us as individuals?

**2** Today, as in Jesus' time, many people claim to be miracle workers of one sort or another, although they may not use the word *miracle*. How can we know if these wonders and miracles, if they are genuine, are truly God-centered and God-directed? (See *John 11:4*.)

## ► STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** The following activity is an object lesson based on the biblical metaphor of fruit. The lessons emphasize the role of God in enabling us to produce good fruit by His guidance in our lives. Depending on your climate, you may need to collect photos rather than actual specimens through forays into nature.

**Group Project/Class Field Trip:** To return to the metaphor with which we opened the class, go into a wooded area or anywhere else you may find fruit trees in the wild. You might be surprised how many you find if you do the research necessary to recognize them. You probably failed to notice them because the fruit they produce bears so little resemblance to anything the average person would want to put in his or her mouth. If possible, gather a little bit of this fruit, which may even be stunted or worm-eaten, and put it next to an example of the same species from a farmers market.

**Compare:** Draw a comparison to what happens to our “fruit” if we don’t have God tending it.

Alternatively, you could draw attention to a species like the ornamental pear tree, a tree that produces beautiful leaves and flowers but no fruit to speak of.

**Compare:** What are the similarities between the ornamental tree and someone merely pretending to live a Christian life? What spiritual lessons can be drawn?

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**Further Study:** “‘By their fruits ye shall know them’ (Matthew 7:20), the Saviour declared. All the true followers of Christ bear fruit to His glory. Their lives testify that a good work has been wrought in them by the Spirit of God, and their fruit is unto holiness. Their lives are elevated and pure. Right actions are the unmistakable fruit of true godliness, and those who bear no fruit of this kind reveal that they have no experience in the things of God. They are not in the Vine. Said Jesus, ‘Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the Vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing.’ John 15:4, 5.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 329.

“All who join themselves to the church but not to the Lord will in time develop their true character. ‘Ye shall know them by their fruits.’ Matt. 7:16. The precious fruit of godliness, temperance, patience, kindness, love, and charity, does not appear in their lives. They bear only thorns and briars. God is dishonored before the world by all such professors.”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 90.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, go over your answer to Sunday’s question. What is the distinction between “being” good and “doing” good?
- ❷ Read carefully Ellen White’s statement about how all those who join themselves to the church but not to the Lord will soon reveal their true character. What does that mean? Why should we each ask ourselves in which category we truly belong? How can we know for sure the answer?
- ❸ Imagine two folk: One is a Seventh-day Adventist who knows and believes all the doctrines—state of the dead, Second Coming, 1844, and so on. This person, however, is mean, harsh, judgmental, and unloving. There’s another person who, while professing faith in Christ, has rejected all these teachings, accepting what we would deem as theological error. Yet, this person is kind, forgiving, loving, and nonjudgmental, everything the “orthodox” Adventist isn’t. Though, of course, we don’t know hearts, if you had to guess which one was closer to the kingdom of God, whom would you choose, and why? What does your answer imply about what you deem is important in Christianity?