



The Fruit of the Spirit is Love, but Not the Romantic Kind
1 John 3 and 4

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Fruit is the natural product of a living thing. The same is true of people as is true of plants. The fruit of a person's life is proof of the life within. Jesus said, "A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit." And then He said, "You shall know them by their fruits."¹ In other words, *the way you live proves what lives in you*. And that's what we're talking about this summer.

The fruit of the Spirit is proof that *Christ* lives in us. The fruit of the Spirit includes the character traits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But there's more to it than being a nice person. The fruit of the Spirit is proof that *Christ* lives in us.

The Bible says that God has "predestined us to become conformed to the image of His Son." Our destiny is to become more and more like Jesus. That's the mission statement of our church – In His Image ... For His Mission. God is constantly at work in us; molding us to look like Jesus, to love like Jesus, and to live like Jesus in every way. What we see in Jesus is what others should see in us.

And the presence or absence of the fruit of the Spirit is obvious. It's obvious in our character, in our moral choices, and especially in our relationships. How we treat each other, how we tolerate each other, how we value and love each other, prove the character within. Again, *the way you live proves what lives in you. Therefore, when you look in the mirror, do you see the fruit of the Spirit? When others look at you, do they see the fruit of the Spirit? Do they see the life of Christ in you?*

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE

"The fruit of the Spirit is love" (Galatians 5:22). I love God, I love my wife, I love college football, and I love chocolate ice cream. Which proves that love is the most broadly used word in the English language. It can be used in so many contexts. It's the most talked about and most sung about human emotion. Love is the most desired, most pursued, and most fragile emotion there is.

One of the most beautiful pictures of love is a wedding. As a beautiful bride and a handsome groom look into each other's eyes, I usually read 1 Corinthians 13, the "love chapter." "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." And then I urge the bride and groom to make 1 Corinthians 13 a way of life; not just loving each other when life is good, but loving each other when life is tough. Then they recite their vows, exchange rings, and I declare them husband and wife. Oh, and, "You may kiss the bride!"

That's how most weddings go. A beautiful bride. A handsome groom. First Corinthians 13. And everyone lives happily ever after. Well, not always.

This morning, we're going to talk about *love, but not the romantic kind*. We're going to talk about the fruit of the Spirit, and the first in the list is love.

All of us want great relationships. We want a great marriage, we want a loving family, we want close friends, and we want to work with nice people. The problem is that relationships can sour. Some of the most intense emotions we experience are due to relationships gone bad.

Perhaps it's your boss who demands too much and never acknowledges your hard work. Perhaps it's a trusted friend who let you down. Perhaps it's your spouse, that person lying in bed beside you with whom you're angry. Perhaps it's one of your children, or your mother-in-law, or your brother or sister. Maybe the father who put too much pressure on you and never said, "I'm proud of you," or the mother who still tries to tell you how to run your life and raise your kids.

Within our network of relationships, there are plenty of chances for things to go wrong, for relationships to sour, and to have something against someone else. But Jesus refuses to let us settle for that.

Jesus declared love as the most important commandment.² "Love the Lord your God with all your heart" and "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). Love is to be the defining mark of the Christian life. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35, NAS).

Jesus said even more demanding things about love. He said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44, ESV). He said, "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14-15, NLT). He's serious about this. We are to love in a way that no one else loves, a way that goes beyond cultural norms. That's why He said, "Everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

In one great, summarizing statement, Jesus said to His disciples, "This is my commandment, love each other the same way I have loved you" (John 15:12, NLT). And years later, in one of his letters, summarizing all Jesus had said about love, the Apostle John wrote, "This is what Jesus said to me. *'If you love Me, then love the way I love.'*"

WHAT HAPPENS WHERE THERE IS NO LOVE

John repeats everything Jesus said about love. In 1 John 3, he shows us *what happens where there is no love*. "For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous" (1 John 3:11-12, ESV).

Love has been the standard "from the beginning." Early in the Old Testament, the Lord said, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). From the beginning of time, love has been God's desire for human relationships. But where there is no love, something bad will always fill its place.

John recalled the story of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve. Cain was a farmer and gave part of his harvest as an offering to God. Abel was a shepherd and gave an animal as an offering to God. Each gave an offering from the fruit of their vocations. Some say that God rejected Cain's offering because it was not a blood sacrifice. That's unlikely, since later in Israel's history, the Lord accepted grain and harvest offerings. So the issue is not what was offered, but how it was offered. The problem with Cain's offering was a problem with Cain's heart. New Testament authors describe Cain as "greedy" and "evil."³ The Lord gave him a second chance to offer a sincere sacrifice. But instead, he got angry with God and resented that fact that God accepted his brother's offering. Cain was jealous. And jealousy led to resentment, resentment led to bitterness, bitterness led to hatred, and hatred led to murder.

And that's what happens where there is no love. There is jealousy, resentment, bitterness, and hatred. And that's why John said in verse 15, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15).

Where there is no love, relationships sour. There's no murder, we just write people off and we forget about them. Or, like weeds in a garden, suspicion grows, distrust grows, animosity grows. Where there is no love, marriages sour. There's no murder, but what is divorce except the death of a marriage. Where there is no love, there is jealousy, resentment, bitterness, and hatred. It all adds up to a type of emotional murder.

HOW DID JESUS LOVE?

That's not what Jesus desires for us. He said to His disciples "This is my commandment, love each other the same way I have loved you" (John 15:12, NLT). So, *how did Jesus love?* John alluded to three ways Jesus loved.

The first way Jesus loved was through *forgiveness*. John said, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:15). This is an implied call to forgiveness. *Love forgives*. Jesus certainly did. As He was nailed to the cross, He said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34, NAS). The cross is the ultimate expression of forgiveness. Jesus has forgiven us of everything we've ever done wrong, and He calls us to forgive just as we have been forgiven.

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother ... 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (Matthew 5:21-22, NIV). Jesus equated the character of the one who hates with the character of the one who murders. And John repeated what he heard Jesus say years earlier. "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15).

Jesus made it very clear. "If you forgive people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive them of their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14-15, paraphrase). Jesus is not making some broad suggestion. He wants us to be specific. Forgiveness focuses on a face, on an offense, on a person. To love the way Jesus loved, we must forgive others the way Jesus has forgiven us.

There are countless reasons why relationships sour, but there is only one reason why relationships stay sour – an unwillingness to forgive. One of the hardest things to say is “I’m sorry. Will you forgive me?” To ask for forgiveness takes humility. It takes admitting we did something wrong. It means owning up to our mistakes. Something just as hard to say is “I forgive you.” To grant forgiveness takes grace. It means letting go of an offense, of a hurt. It means granting to others what Jesus has granted to us.

The second way Jesus loved was through *sacrifice*. John said, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” (1 John 3:16). *Love sacrifices*. Years earlier, John heard Jesus say, “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11, NAS). John heard Jesus say, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13, NAS). Jesus voluntarily extended His arms on the cross so that we might be forgiven of everything we’ve ever done wrong, so that we might experience peace with God and peace within, and so that one day we might see Him face to face and spend eternity with Him in heaven! For Jesus, sacrifice meant the cross! That’s how far His love was willing to go.

What does sacrifice mean for us? What does it mean to “lay down our lives” for each other? Sacrifice is viewing someone else’s need with a sense of urgency. It’s a willingness to suffer personal loss in order to relieve someone else’s suffering. It’s foregoing personal comfort in order to relieve someone else’s pain.⁴ Sacrifice costs something. And we make the sacrifice when we are motivated by a love that cannot be indifferent or passive to someone else’s need.

A third way Jesus loved was through *compassion*. “And seeing the crowd, He felt compassion” (Matthew 9:36). He was moved deeply within. *Love cares*. So to love like Jesus loved, John said, “If anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:17-18).⁵

When Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” He also defined that neighbor in the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

“As a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, some robbers attacked him. They tore off his clothes, beat him, and left him lying there, almost dead. It happened that a Jewish priest was going down that road. When he saw the man, he walked by on the other side. Next, a Levite came there, and after he went over and looked at the man, he walked by on the other side of the road. Then a Samaritan traveling down the road ... saw the man, (and) he felt very sorry for him. The Samaritan ... poured olive oil and wine on his wounds, and bandaged them. Then he put the hurt man on his own donkey and took him to an inn where he cared for him. The next day, the Samaritan brought out two coins, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of this man. If you spend more money on him, I will pay it back to you when I come again.’ ” Then Jesus said, “Which one of these three men do you think was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by the robbers?” The expert on the law answered, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Then go and do what he did.” (Luke 10:30-37, NCV)

Who is your neighbor? Anyone who at any time needs your help. And, if anyone at any time needs your help, then help them.

In the parable, two men refused to help. They were too busy. And we know what that feels like. We're consumed by our schedules, our jobs, and our families. We're too busy to be interrupted and too selfish to be inconvenienced. And besides, a woman shouldn't stop to help a car broken down on the side of the road, that's dangerous. And we shouldn't give money to a homeless guy who'll just use it to get drunk. There are a thousand reasons not to stop and help. But the Samaritan became the "Good Samaritan" because he was willing to stop and help.

- Love is willing to be interrupted. Love is willing to be inconvenienced.
- Love is moved by the needs and hurts of other people.
- Love cannot remain indifferent or passive.
- Love sees. Love notices. Love listens.
- Love cares. Love empathizes. Love comforts.
- Love acts, love helps, and love serves.
- Love shares.
- Love is open-handed with time, with money, with possessions.
- Love answers the phone at 2:00 in the morning.
- Love asks, "How are you really doing?"
- Love reaches out, love reaches down, and love raises up.
- Love chooses. Love chooses to forgive. Love chooses to sacrifice. Love chooses to care.

"By this" – by forgiveness, sacrifice, and compassion – "we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him" (1 John 3:19, ESV). *We know we belong to Jesus if we love the way Jesus loved.*

LOVE THE WAY I LOVE

John continues this theme in 1 John 4. "We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar." If we sing how much we love God, and then leave this place with animosity toward someone in the church, or someone in our family, or a neighbor or whomever, we are liars! Our worship is disqualified! "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:19-21, ESV).

What does this look like in real life? The answer is found in the "one another" verses of the New Testament. We've heard them before, but because we have yet to master them, they are worth another look this morning.

- "love one another, even as I have loved you, you also love one another" (John 13:34)
- "let us not judge one another" (Romans 14:13)
- "accept one another" (Romans 15:7)
- "serve one another" (Galatians 5:13)

- “be patient, bearing with one another” (Ephesians 4:2)
- “be kind to one another” (Ephesians 4:32)
- “forgive one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32)
- “comfort one another” (1 Thessalonians 4:18)
- “encourage one another, and build one another up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- “live in peace with one another” (1 Thessalonians 5:13)
- “pray for one another” (James 5:16).

This is what life is supposed to look like for those who love Jesus. This is what the church is supposed to look like. This is what family is supposed to look like. This is what marriage is supposed to look like. Do you hear Jesus? ***“If you love Me, then love the way I love.”*** And all of these “one another” verses are snapshots of what that looks like.

This is so important I want to make this a family assignment for you. There are two handouts in today’s bulletin. One with the definitions of the fruit of the Spirit. The other is a list of the “one another” verses in the New Testament. I urge you to use these tools this summer; with your family. Make the time. As Reggie Joiner suggests, take advantage of morning time, drive time, meal time, and bed time. Talk about the fruit of the Spirit. Talk about what it really means to love one another.

CONCLUSION

We can’t just talk about love, we must show love. “The fruit of the Spirit is love.” So, I want end this message with a challenge, with two words – ***who and how***. Who is God telling you to love better? And how is God telling you to love them? How is He telling you ...

- to love your spouse better?
- to love your parents better?
- to love your children better?
- to love your neighbor better?
- to love your boss or co-workers better?
- to love your friends better?
- to love someone who hurt you?
- to love someone who irritates you?
- Who else is God putting on your mind? How is God telling you to love them?

I challenge you to go home and write down the name(s) He brings to your mind. Then allow Him to guide you with the next step to take in order to love that person better.

The way you live proves what lives in you, and who lives in you. Therefore, when you look in the mirror, do you see the fruit of the Spirit? When others look at you, do they see the fruit of the Spirit? Do they see the life of Christ in you?

NOTES

¹ See Matthew 7:17-18, 20.

² Echoing Jesus, the Apostle Paul said, “Walk in love, just as Christ loved you and gave Himself up for us” (Ephesians 5:2).² He said, “Let everything you do be done in love” (1 Corinthians 16:14, NAS). Peter said, “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8, NAS). Again echoing Jesus, the Apostle John said, “Let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8, NAS).

³ See Jude 11-13, 1 John 3:12.

⁴ Paul urged the Corinthians to sacrifice for one another. “Right now you have plenty and can help those who are in need. Later, they will have plenty and can share with you when you need it. In this way, things will be equal” (2 Corinthians 8:14, NLT).

⁵ See James 2:15-17.