

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Sermon: "The fruit of the Spirit."

Scripture: Galatians 5:13-26, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Rev. Steve Filyk

September 13, 2026

Opening Hymn: And can it be? 352

Choruses: Holy Spirit, Living Breath of God & Change My Heart, O God

Song after sermon: I Need Thee Every Hour

Closing Hymn: They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love (We are one in the Spirit) 471

Have you ever wished that you had more
of a certain quality of character that you admire in others?
That you were more peaceful or more generous or more patient...
That these gifts/qualities came more easily, more naturally to you?

Have you ever wished the same for your family?
Or your community group?
Or your church?

We've all been involved in communities
That are kind and gracious.
And we've all been in circles
Where people tear each other apart
Behind their backs.

Have you ever wondered how you or your communities
Might grow in qualities that are good and pleasing?

Most of us can think of someone we know
who seems to have these qualities almost naturally.
They are patient when everyone else is frustrated.
They are generous without making a big deal about it.
They bring peace into a room rather than tension.
And if we're honest, we sometimes wish we were a little more like them.
So how does that kind of character grow in us?

Ancient philosophers tell us

That we grow our character through re-enactment.

Aristotle tells us that "We become just by doing just acts,
temperate by doing temperate acts,
brave by doing brave acts." [Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics II.1]

Modern self-help tells us the same.

In his bestseller, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People"

Stephen Covey makes the following argument:

"Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit;
sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny."
[Stephen R. Covey, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People]

So what does Scripture tell us about growing in grace?
Is it simply practising those things that we want to become?

In today's Bible lesson from Galatians
The Apostle Paul is addressing a divided community.
The church Paul planted had found freedom in Christ.
But now, instead of "trusting Jesus' Gospel,
they've begun to follow a "different gospel" (see Gal. 1:6-7).

As a result, they're accepting or rejecting one another
based on human traditions and social status,
instead of sharing and experiencing God's gracious love with each other...

....Paul teaches them to return to Jesus' real Gospel
and to participate with (rather than oppose) the Spirit's work,
which provides the conditions needed for spiritual fruit to grow.

[BibleProject Scholarship Team. (2025, March 24). The Fruit of the Spirit (and Its Meaning) in the Bible. Retrieved September 9, 2026, from BibleProject website: <https://bibleproject.com/articles/fruits-spirit-and-their-meanings-bible/>]

The community in Galatia has forgotten
that the freedom they have received
Is not a freedom to simply do as they see fit.
They have been freed so they can direct their energies
to the life Jesus has called them to.
They have been freed to "serve one another humbly in love" [Galatians 5:13].

To live otherwise is to focus on their own desires.
 And if they all focus on their own desires
 Their community will be torn apart.

Paul makes this clearer by describing two options, two paths:
 Gratifying the desires of the flesh or walking by the Spirit.
 As one scholar notes, “The spirit and the flesh in this context
 are not components of human nature but two realities
 on which individuals can base their existence,
 two directions toward which they can move.” [Cousar 137]

Paul first describes the ‘acts of the flesh’.
 This is one path communities can take.
 Some of these sins are the ones we would immediately identify as serious—
 sexual immorality, drunkenness, debauchery.
 But then Paul starts talking about hatred, jealousy, anger,
 selfish ambition, envy and division.

In other words, the works of the flesh
 aren't just the things we might hear about on the news.
 Some of them can and do happen right here
 in our homes, our friendships,
 our workplaces and even in the church.
 The flesh shows up whenever our desires
 become more important than loving God
 and loving our neighbour.

Paul then describes the other path.
 This path is marked by character
 That make people pause and wonder.
 Paul calls them the fruit of the Spirit:
 love, joy, peace, forbearance [patience],
 kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
 gentleness and self-control.

As you can imagine, taking this path,

Embodying these characteristics
 Will have a radically different impact on the church community.

But how are people who have been freed by Christ
 to choose the better path?
 How do we cultivate such fruit?
 Is it as the ancient philosophers and modern psychologists suggest?
 We just need to practice the good and avoid the bad
 And repetition will eventually become character?
 It sounds reasonable...
 Some people think that this is what the church is about.
 It's just a school to develop virtue.

Paul suggests another option.

Paul suggests that as we stay close to God
 and open our lives to the Spirit,
 these characteristics of Christ will begin to become evident in us.

Our task isn't to manufacture the fruit of the Spirit;
 Our job is to stay close to the One who grows it.
 Our task isn't to manufacture these characteristics by focusing on them.
 Our job is to walk by the Spirit—to keep in step with the Spirit.

But that raises another question.
 “So how do we actually keep in step with the Spirit?
 What does that look like on an ordinary Sunday afternoon?”

PAUSE

I've been reading a book
 Called “Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal About Spiritual Growth”.
 The book is the result of a research project where the authors
 Surveyed a diverse group of Christian communities
 To better understand what activities and behaviors
 move people forward in their journey of faith.
 The research revealed that seven personal practices

were powerful catalysts of spiritual growth.

[The practices include reflection on Scripture, Bible reading, prayer to seek guidance, prayer to confess sin, tithing, journaling, solitude.]

The practice that had the greatest influence

was reflecting on Scripture and asking,

'What does this mean for my life?

[Greg L Hawkins & Cally Parkinson "Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal About Spiritual Growth" 118]

Have you ever wished that you had more

of those qualities of character

that Paul describes as the fruit of the Spirit?

Love, joy, peace,

Forbearance [patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

gentleness and self-control.

Have you ever wished the same for your family?

Or your community group?

Or your church?

According to Paul we cannot manufacture these fruit

But we can facilitate their development by walking by the Spirit,

And walking by the Spirit means an active participation in practices

That keep God and his kingdom at the forefront of our thoughts.

During my post-surgery convalescence,

I decided to re-read the Gospels.

Not in small increments, but in bigger chunks.

The reality is that this surgery has freed up more time.

And you can only watch so many Facebook reels

Of people turning wood or fixing their cars.

I can't measure exactly how immersing myself in Scripture

has been growing grace in my life.

But I have noticed something.

The more time I've spent in Scripture, the less interested

I've been in some of the things that used to occupy my attention.

It's almost as if God has been gently turning my attention toward better things,

Like listening to my family, praying for my community.

Keep in mind I hadn't aimed at becoming more

more peaceful or patient or loving.

I was simply spending more time with God.

Again, we don't manufacture the fruit of the Spirit;

we stay close to the One who grows it.

When we stay close we don't have to manufacture love.

We don't have to manufacture peace.

We don't have to grit our teeth and manufacture patience.

All we need to do is turn our attention toward God.

Read his word.

Talk to him and listen to him.

Confess when we've gone our own way.

Make space in our lives for him.

So here's my invitation for you this week:

choose one way to make more room for God.

Maybe it's reading a chapter of Scripture each day.

Maybe it's five quiet minutes of prayer before you reach for your phone.

Maybe it's setting aside some time simply to ask, 'God, what are you trying to show me?'"

Do you really want to see the development

of this Christ-like character in your life?

Then don't begin by trying harder to be more loving or patient.

Begin by drawing near to God.

We don't manufacture the fruit of the Spirit;

we stay close to the One who grows it.

And as we keep in step with the Spirit,

he produces in us the character of Christ.

As one scholar has noted "

The Spirit is... eager to function with power in the church
and in individuals to produce his "fruit"
and only needs to be allowed the opportunity." [Cousar 138]

Amen.