



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

Do you bear
fruit?

Peace

Gentleness

Self-Control

MIDWEEK SCRIPT

2017

August

Session 1 – Do you bear fruit?

Welcome! In the month of August, the sermons will focus on the fruit of the Holy Spirit, in other words, on that which He produces. The gift of the Holy Spirit is dispensed in the sacrament of Holy Sealing. If the sealed believer gives the Holy Spirit room to unfold, divine virtues will develop. Through our midweek experience sessions this month, we will focus on a few of these virtues, starting this week with the fruit of faith, love, and oneness.

We get an insight to the value Jesus Christ puts on the development of spiritual fruit in His encounter with the unfruitful fig tree. In Mark 11:12-14 we can read, *“Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response Jesus said to it, ‘Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.’”*

From afar, the fig tree looked like it could be fruitful because it was full of healthy leaves. But when Jesus came closer to this tree, He saw that it had no fruit, and He cursed it. However, there was a good reason the fig tree had no fruit – it wasn't fig season! It was perfectly normal and natural for the tree to be without figs at that time of the year. But Jesus cursed this tree anyway, and it died. Why did He do this?

There are two explanations. The first is that Jesus wanted to use the tree as a symbolic image of the people of Israel. The Israelites were known to be a very religious people. They were dedicated to observing the commandments of Moses, and it was very important to them that everybody saw them observing the commandments. But coming closer to them, Jesus could see that in their hearts there was no living faith and not much love for God.

The second explanation is that Jesus wanted to make it clear that producing leaves alone is not enough; there must also be fruit. What are the “leaves” in our lives? The leaves are what others can see of us, our behavior. Maybe one looks at us and assumes that we are faithful people. We go to church every Sunday, and we greet everybody and smile at everyone. Observing us, one can say, “They're serving God – they sing in the choir,” or “They're serving God – they clean the church,” and so on. In the “leaves” of our behavior, one can see our commitment to God and to the church, which is good and necessary. But Jesus wants to come closer to us, very close to us, to check if we're producing fruit in our hearts. He wants to see if we have true love for Him and a living faith behind our “good” behavior. In order to check this, He comes very close because for Him, it's not only important to have leaves, it's also important to have the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, we must have both – fruit *and* leaves. The fig tree cannot have fruit without the leaves; nor can we have internal virtues without behaviors that support them. Some people say, “It's not that important how I act. What's important is what is in my heart.” But we need leaves *and* fruit. The content of our hearts must match with our behavior, which is one way we can glorify God, our Father. That which people can see, our behavior in society and in our families, has to match our hearts.

So what is one fruit that Christ wants to find in our hearts? Faith. We know this because in Luke 18:8 we can read that Jesus wondered aloud, *“...when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”* What kind of faith is He looking for? Not just a belief in the existence of God the Father and Creator and in Jesus, His Son, but a living faith that results in actions that demonstrate our trust in Him. Do we believe that Jesus really loves us enough to sustain us when obedience to His word puts us in a position that feels vulnerable? Do we believe that He truly has forgiven us so that we do not have to live bound in chains of shame, guilt, and inadequacy? Our faith is measured by how we apply the Gospel in every part of our lives, not only the parts one can see when we are in society or in the congregation, but also when we are at home and in the deepest parts of our hearts. The Gospel and the commandments of God apply at all times, whether someone sees us or not.

Jesus is also looking for love in those who will be His bride. Love can be measured by our motivation to serve God and to bring our offerings. We do not serve God for our own interests. The real motivation, the deep motivation to serve our Lord, to commit ourselves in His work of salvation and to bring our offerings, is because we love Him.

Another fruit He's looking for is the fruit of oneness. Jesus lamented over the city of Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37, saying that He had "*wanted to gather [them] as a hen gathers her chicks*" but they wouldn't. Then, in the Garden of Gethsemane during the most trying hours of His life, Jesus prayed for oneness among all those who would believe in Him, saying, "*I do not pray for these [disciples] alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us...*" (John 17: 20-21). That was very important for Him. He wants the fruit of oneness in us. It's nice to come to church and greet everybody with a smile, but are we really one? Jesus suffers when the congregation is divided. He suffers as a father and a mother suffer when their children are divided. Jesus wants to find the fruit of oneness in our hearts, the willingness to be one, to contribute to the unity of the people of God. And then the question is very simple – what are we, individually, willing to give up for oneness? What are we, personally, willing to renounce for unity?

Jesus asks us to bear much fruit, which we can only do when we abide in Him. He is the vine and we are the branches (John 15:1-8). Chief Apostle Schneider continually reminds us that we prove the activity of the Holy Spirit in us by loving our neighbor. What better way to love our neighbor than to share the fruit of the Holy Spirit with them!

Session 2 – Peace

Welcome back! In this session, we will continue our study on the fruit of the Spirit by growing in our understanding of peace. Peace is something we all seek, but it is often short-lived and fleeting. At the close of the day, we may long to retreat to a serene place where we can rest and prepare ourselves for the next day. After a long workweek, we may seek the refuge of the weekend, but after a quick couple of days, we return back to our daily routine. While these moments are wonderful and needed, there is no way they offer the same peace that has been offered to us by Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Peace is a blessing and a gift. It is security, stability, and serenity, even when surrounded by turmoil. The purpose of Christ's coming into the world was to bring spiritual peace with God. Through His sacrificial work on the cross, Jesus opened the way for all to enter into a peaceful relationship with God. Christians can live with an unexplainable peace because of their belief in Jesus Christ, the Gospel, and the assurance of their salvation.

The closer we draw to Jesus, the more we will realize that peace is not something we can develop on our own, but is instead given by Jesus. As Jesus was coming to the completion of His earthly ministry, He informed His disciples of His departure and then spoke several words of comfort to them. Through His words, He sought to give them peace. Listen to Jesus' words in John 14:27 – "*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*" In these couple of sentences, Jesus teaches us that the peace He offers is much different from that which is offered in our world, the peace that is of our own creation. From Jesus' words, we can gain a sense of the feelings of the disciples at that time. We can imagine that they were nervous, concerned, and worried about what was to happen once their Teacher departed. Jesus' words served as an assurance to them that if they continued to be rooted in Him, they would have peace, no matter what tribulation they would face.

Paul encouraged the Colossians to "*let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful*" (Colossians 3:15). When the Holy Spirit reigns in our hearts, then the very same peace offered to the disciples can develop and be evident in our lives. True peace saturates a soul when it is in true alignment with the way of Jesus Christ. Be mindful of the peace that is given by God through His Son and the Spirit.

Our days are often filled with things that work to steal away our peace. Concerns about our families, our jobs, and our financial situations, along with worries about past mistakes that haunt us, relationships that are in disarray, and griefs over the loss of loved ones, or the way things used to be or opportunities missed. Any peace we have is under constant attack. How is it possible to live and walk each day with peace ruling in our hearts? Is it possible to have a serene composure in the midst of everything happening in life? Is it possible to

have peace within yourself and peace with yourself? By seeking each day to fulfill the will of God, and with the power of the Holy Spirit guiding us, it is possible!

When God's peace is paramount in our hearts, it is our mission to share that peace with others. The Bible encourages us in Romans 12:18 to *"live peaceably with all men,"* and in Hebrews 12:14 to *"pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord."* When you find yourself in a situation surrounded by those who are in distress, be a peaceful presence in their midst and share Who is the source of your peace. No doubt, this is difficult to do, but we must trust in the power of the Holy Spirit.

As Christians, we are on a continual journey of development fueled by the Holy Spirit, who is at work transforming our nature. We have the ability to grow in each of the character traits that make up the fruit of the Spirit. Allow the peace of God to develop in your heart, walk with composure, and be an example of the effectiveness of the Spirit.

Session 3 – Gentleness

Hello! Welcome back to this month's small group series on fruit of the Spirit. This month might start to feel like a checklist. Last week we needed to work on peace, this week is gentleness – what is my next task? But thinking that way will start us down the wrong track. The fruit of the Spirit is the result of the Spirit working in us. Only by abiding in Him and trusting in Him to do the hard work of transformation can we bear fruit.

Jesus taught that the genuineness of His followers would be demonstrated by good fruit from their lives (Matthew 7:16-20, Luke 13:6-9). That fruit would show itself as part of their character, woven into their natural daily lives. So what fruit are we going to discuss this week? Gentleness.

When we hear the word gentleness, we may often associate it with being shy or soft-spoken. Perhaps a certain person comes to mind when you think of this word. But let's dig a little deeper.

The Greek word for gentleness is *prautes* (prah-oo-tace), which is defined as *meekness* and means "strength under control." Therefore, gentleness is not weakness, but strength! It is a fruit of the Spirit that enables a believer to place the will of God before their own.

When we look at Jesus, our greatest example, we see that He constantly subjected His unfathomable power to the will of His Father. Jesus' gentleness, His strength under control, is displayed in John 18 when the soldiers and Pharisees came to arrest Him. Right away, in defense of Jesus, Peter draws a sword and cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus tells Peter to put away his sword and asks, *"Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?"* (John 18:11). Peter's emotions take over in this moment, whereas Jesus submits His power to His Father's will. We all have the strength of our own free will. However, with the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to submit our strength to the greater strength and purposes of God.

Rather than shyness or weakness, the fruit of gentleness calls us to be surrendered. A Christ-like gentleness is not clutching and grabbing for control; it is the Spirit of following Jesus – humble, yet strengthened in Him.

How do we surrender ourselves to the will and purposes of God? By continually saying "no" to our human sinful nature. If you read Galatians 5:19-21, just before Paul gets to explaining the fruit of the Spirit, he first talks about the "acts of flesh." It's not a pretty list. But this is what comes from our sinful nature. The next list in verses 22-23 is much more heartening to read: ***"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."***

We want to be all these things, but the problem comes when we believe that fruit-bearing is simply a matter of our will, of trying to "be good," instead of a result of our connection to Christ. It's the fruit of the Spirit. Not my fruit. Not your fruit. The only way we can truly win the fight of saying "no" to our sinful nature and letting the Holy Spirit work in us is by laying down our fruit of good intention and self-improvement and by echoing what David says, *"You are my Lord; There is no good for me outside of You"* (Psalm 16:2, translation from RVR95).

We bear fruit when we are grafted to Jesus, the true vine. Jesus makes us new – abiding in Him, resting, dwelling, *remaining* in Him – is the source of our goodness, the source of our fruit. So let our prayers this week be: *Father, help us bear fruit that glorifies You by laying aside our will for Yours.*

Session 4 – Self-Control

Welcome to our last session this month. To wrap up our discussion on the fruit of the Spirit, this session will focus on self-control.

Is there currently something in your life that you are striving to have control over? Having self-control is difficult, but it is necessary in all circumstances. When we fail to have control over our habits, our words, or our actions, it is detrimental to ourselves, to our relationship with others, or even to our relationship with God. In moments when we lose control over ourselves, we give the devil something to use against us. We give him the knowledge of the specific things that tempt us to ignore self-control, and he knows that in these moments, we are not allowing ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit. From there, the devil does not have to do much to urge us farther down the path of giving into our desires and passions. He will have an easier time of encouraging us to have more moments of no self-control, while at the same time, we will feel even more defeated because of our lack of control. It is as Proverbs 25:28 says, *“Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.”* When we have no rule over ourselves, anything can get in and we will have a hard time protecting ourselves. Hence, our lack of self-control causes us to sin, and ultimately, we will be further separated from God.

There are many situations where our self-control will be tested. These can fall anywhere on a spectrum of deciding how much we may eat or drink, choosing to use words of love or sarcastic words that will cause pain, allowing reactions of anger or pride to overtake us, or giving into sins such as theft or adultery. Some moments where we lack self-control may seem innocent or rational, given the circumstances. However, can these small, seemingly inconsequential decisions lead to bigger, more frequent decisions that cause us to falter on the path that God has set for us? Each time we lose control of our habits, instincts, or desires, it can cause the walls around us to crumble. Knowing this, we must have courage – courage to struggle against ourselves so that we can become the new creature spoken of in 2 Corinthians 3:18: *“But 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.”*

Since self-control is essential in guarding ourselves and maintaining our relationship with others and with God, how do we stop ourselves from losing our control? When the Holy Spirit leads us and we are truly honest with ourselves and aware of the things that can cause us to lose control, then we can strive to guard our thoughts or our desires. We can stay determined to have self-control. However, it is important to note that we can do all of these things and yet, we will, at some point, experience failure. This is because true self-control can only come from the Spirit. After all, self-control is a fruit of the Spirit; it does not come from within us.

Our victory in practicing self-control comes from being led by the Holy Spirit. As imperfect humans, it is easy to be selfish and give into our desires. This is why self-control can be so hard to maintain. However, the Holy Spirit is not beholden to our desires, so when He dwells within us and we give him space to work inside of us, then He can transform our desires into something that aligns with God’s will. When we are focused on living a life directed toward God and His will, we will find that it becomes easier to practice self-control in the future. We can look to the temptation that Jesus faced in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). In this moment, Jesus exercised self-control when tempted by the devil with food after having fasted for forty days. He could’ve given into the temptation, but He didn’t. Why? Christ knew His identity as the Son of God and His mission to do His Father’s will. These things didn’t falter when Christ faced temptation, and for Him, they were above everything else, and so He was able to maintain control and have victory.

We are children of God and we also have a mission: to serve others and God. We want this to be our focus because this knowledge will help us practice self-control. When we let go of ourselves and our own desires or instincts, and we allow the Holy Spirit to increase in us, then we can come to rely more on God and His power to guide us in moments when we need self-control.