

**Connecting The Dots:** As I begin this morning, I want to take a few moments to connect the dots between what was said last week and what will be said this week. Last Sunday, I declared that there is a destiny written over your life...that God has fruitfulness in mind for you. I said that *the key to a fruitful life is found in remaining connected to Jesus.*

In John 15, Jesus describes Himself as a Vine and us as being like branches. Just as a branch requires life from the vine in order to bear fruit; so it is with us. Apart from Jesus (our source of life), we can produce nothing that will bring glory to God. And so, remaining connected to Jesus is the only way to ensure our fruitfulness.

I also said that *a key to remaining connected to Jesus is our obedience.* In John 15:10, 14, Jesus said, *“If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love...You are my friends if you do what I command.”*

Last week I shared the analogy of an Olympic sprinter in the blocks, head down, their body ready to explode out of the blocks, and their ears straining to hear the crack of the gun. It’s a picture of obedience: waiting, listening, focussed, and ready to respond when Jesus calls. It’s not about perfection, it’s about a posture, a willingness, a surrendered-ness.

That part of us that demands the right to determine the when, the where, and the how of our lives...that part of us died when we gave ourselves to Jesus. When we gave ourselves to Jesus, we gave up the right to our lives...we belong to Him now. As I said last week: we do

not invite Jesus into our life, we give our life to Jesus; **our** life becomes **His** home.

Obedience is a key to intimacy with God; it’s a key to remaining connected to the life of Jesus. But hear this, it is not the only key. The words I spoke last week were true, but they were incomplete. There is always great danger in taking any one sermon, or any one biblical text and assuming it says all there is to say about a subject.

Last week I asked you to make obedience to Jesus the priority of your life; it was a call to surrender, to hand over your life to Jesus. In many respects, last week was about emptying one’s self, and this morning I want to talk with you about being filled.

Fruitfulness is our destiny, and obedience is a key to fruitfulness, but we are not forgiven and then left to ourselves to make it happen. When we give our life to Jesus, **our life** becomes **His Home**; Jesus takes up residence in our lives through the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit becomes the engine, the driving force, behind our fruitfulness and obedience.

**Pray:** for an encounter...not just with truth, but with the One who is Faithful and True. Renew our minds, speak to our hearts, conform our character.

**Context:** If you have your Bibles with you this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to Galatians 5:16-26. If you are using the blue Bibles in front of you, you can find our text on page \_\_\_\_\_. And as you are turning there, allow me to give you a little context for what we are about to read.

Paul wrote this letter to a church situated in a Roman Province in Asia Minor, in what is now modern day Turkey. He wrote to a church he had planted that was in danger of turning away from the gospel he preached. He had come to them earlier, preaching the good news of Jesus Christ: that God so loved the world that He sent His One and Only Son, to deal with the sin that separates us from God. He told them that Jesus died on the cross to pay for their sins, and three days later rose from the grave in victory over sin and death.

Some time after Paul left, some Jewish visitors came to the church with a different take on what Jesus did or didn't accomplish through the cross. *Jesus' death does deal with our past sins, but He can't help you in becoming holy...we need Moses for that. If you want to live a holy life, you need to obey the Old Testament Law.* Essentially, what they were saying was: *Jesus gets us started, but Moses gets us to the finish line.*

When Paul heard this, he went ballistic. And in response he wrote to the Galatians with one overarching message: *Jesus provides us with all that we need for life and godliness.* Allow me to read this text for us.

*16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

*19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who [practice these things] will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

*22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience [forbearance], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.<sup>1</sup>*

In a span of ten verses, Paul mentions the Holy Spirit seven times. His presence is central to intimacy with God, the Holy Spirit is central to a fruitful life. This morning I want to talk about Him, about what He does, about how we can cooperate with Him, and then conclude by looking at the fruit He wants to produce within us and our church community. So let's begin by talking about His work.

**The Holy Spirit's Work:** A number of weeks ago, we talked about His activity in our praying: if we are willing to listen, He will speak to us. We also talked about His activity when we read the Scriptures: He works to illuminate the Scriptures, revealing truth and applying it to our lives.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scriptural notations have been taken from the New International Version unless otherwise stated.

In Galatians 5, we see another side of Him and His work: the Holy Spirit is the **CIO**, *the Chief Internal Officer*. He doesn't bark commands at us from the outside, He lives within us, working to transform us from the inside out.

Our text this morning describes two ways of living; the one leads to death and the other to life. In the Scriptures, sin is talked about in two primary ways: (1) as the wrong things we do; or, (2) as an internal, enslaving force. And the death and resurrection of Jesus has dealt with both. As the Son of God, Jesus died in our place, shouldering the punishment for our rebellion against God, but He also dealt with sin as an enslaving force: *if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*<sup>2</sup>

Now, the Spirit's presence does not prevent us from ever doing anything wrong, but His presence guarantees that transformation is coming. *God loves us as we are, but He does not leave us as we are.* Listen to the words of 1 Corinthians 6:11, "*But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*"<sup>3</sup>

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 says, "**17** Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. **18** And we...are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

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<sup>2</sup> John 8:36.

<sup>3</sup> New Living Translation.

<sup>4</sup> New Living Translation.

The *work* of the Spirit is just that, it's His work. He's the One who enables the fruit of God's character to grow in our lives. And like all physical fruit, it doesn't grow overnight; it takes time and it takes His pruning.

The Holy Spirit doesn't dispense His fruit like a clerk in a store. *I'll take one bottle of love, a handful of joy, a pinch of peace, and three pounds of patience please.* He gives us the gift of Himself; as He renews our minds, and fills our lives, the contours of our lives begin to morph and change.

In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul says, "*Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. 13 For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.*"<sup>4</sup> A fruitful life is first and foremost a life of receiving from Him.

But while the Holy Spirit is the One who produces this fruit, our part is so much more than lounging by the poolside, sipping margaritas. He does the work, but we need to cooperate with Him; this is where our obedience and submission come in. Let's turn our attention now to our the part we have to play.

**Cooperating With the Spirit's Work**

**Illus:** By a show of hands, how many of you have ever been in a three legged race? How many of you enjoyed the experience? *Not me...*they are incredibly frustrating!

When I'm on my own, I can run a race without thinking; my legs do exactly what I want them to do. But it's infinitely more difficult to walk, let alone run when you are tied to another person. In order to do well, two people need to coordinate their movement, they need to be moving in the same direction, at the same pace, etc. It's not easy, it's not second nature. Most of my three-legged races ended with me or my partner on the ground, with one of us getting dragged about.

When we give our life to Jesus, **our life** becomes **His home**. To continue with the previous analogy, the Holy Spirit binds us to the life of Jesus: our legs are cinched tight, and we are invited to get in sync with the rhythms of His life, His movements, and His priorities.

In Galatians 5:16, 25, Paul defines our part in our transformation: we are to **walk** by the Spirit (vs. 16), to **live** by the Spirit, and to **keep in step** with the Spirit (vs. 25).

Paul's way of speaking might sound foreign, but he was drawing upon a Jewish way of thinking. Walking with someone was seen as a relational act; it was a way of keeping company with another, moving in the same direction, and arriving at the same destination.

When we walk by the Spirit, or live by the Spirit, we will be in step with the life of God and out of step with our sinful nature. Paul is picking up on a Jewish understanding of obedience. Obedience is

ultimately about bringing one's life into alignment with the life of God.

Once again, if we return to our three-legged analogy, walking with the Spirit means keeping company with Him, moving in the same direction, so that we can arrive at the same destination.

**Illus:** If you are anything like me, then you have a number of pet peeves in your life. One of mine is bumper stickers. It's not that I'm against bumper stickers, it's just that there are so many lousy ones. But even I have to admit there are a few that make me laugh, like this one: "Jesus loves you, but everyone else thinks you're a jerk."

But one of my all-time least favourite bumper stickers is the following: "*God is my co-pilot*". If I'm honest what ticks me off about this bumper sticker is that the person who came up with the idea made a whole lot of money off some really bad theology. *God is my co-pilot? Really?* The God who created the universe, the One who sustains everything that exists, He's a "co-pilot"? He's ready to take the steering wheel of my life if I go down or need a break? That's not how it works.

*The Holy Spirit does not operate against our will or without our welcome.* But our life with God is not a democracy. That part of us that demands the right to determine the when, the where, and the how of our lives...that part of us died when we gave ourselves to Jesus.

To keep in step with the Spirit is to walk in active submission to where He's leading. When we strike out in our own direction, or fall on the ground in process, He'll stop and wait until we're willing to start moving with Him. The Holy Spirit won't drag us.

Gordon Fee writes, “If we live by the Spirit, let us conform to the life of the Spirit.”<sup>5</sup> Put another way, since the Spirit has given us life, we should let Him control our lives. When we say “yes” to Him, to where He is leading, He plants new desires in our hearts, He fills our minds with the thoughts of God, He fills us with the power to obey, and He actively produces the fruit of God’s character within us.

In the time remaining I want to share a few thoughts about this fruit.

**The Fruit of God’s Character:**

Paul writes, “*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience [forbearance], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.*” It’s an impressive list isn’t it? I’d like to have this fruit present within my life, wouldn’t you?

All week, as I’ve been pouring over this list, I’ve found myself battling my cultural tendencies. I tend to think about intimacy with God as being a private interchange between Him and me; it takes work for me to recognize that intimacy with God is tied to our life together. Remember, Paul didn’t write this letter to an individual Christian, he wrote it to an entire community. He wrote this letter to a community that had been fractured and was beginning to turn on one another.

In vs. 14 and 15, Paul writes, “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” **15** *If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*” In vs. 25-26 he writes, “**25** *Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*” **26** *Let us not become conceited,*

*provoking and envying each other.*” More than half of the vices Paul mentions in vs. 19-21, aren’t private internal sins...these are sins against one another, sins that destroy a community.

When Paul writes about the fruit of the Spirit, he has in mind the health of this church community...*Galatians, if you keep in step with the Spirit, your love for one another will abound, joy will be your corporate experience, there will be peace and harmony between you instead of discord/dissension and factions, you will practice kindness, goodness, gentleness towards one another, you will be faithful, that is, dependable/loyal/trustworthy.*

The Holy Spirit wants to conform your life to the the life of Jesus; He wants to reproduce the character qualities of Jesus within you, so that our community might reflect the beauty, the grace, and the strength of God to one another, and to our world.

And while this all sounds wonderful, more often than not, this fruit ripens in our life through our encounters with difficult people. It’s not a coincidence that when we pray for God to make us more loving, we find ourselves in situations where it is very difficult to love the people around us. In those times we either blow it, fake it, or, we keep in step with the Spirit and rely on His strength to love in the manner He directs.

Or perhaps you find yourself praying for the peace of Christ, and wouldn’t you know it, you can’t find peace within because you are at odds with your brother, your sister, your friend, your co-worker, your

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<sup>5</sup> Gordon Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence.*

spouse. If you pray for peace to take root in your life, be prepared for the Spirit to reveal the places where peace-making is required.

If you begin to pray for patience, or kindness, you may find that the Spirit will use the people around you to refine this fruit in your life.

**Illus:** A number of years ago, I discovered this firsthand through a series of encounters with a guy named Paul. At the time, I had been pastoring at First Alliance Church for 6-7 years, Luke was still really small, and I was growing in favour with our leadership. I was invited into new responsibilities, I was teaching a lot more, managing a part of the staff team, everything was going well.

One Sunday, in the early Fall, I was on to preach and that morning before I left the house I made a fateful mistake: when I got dressed, I forgot to wear a tie. Our church was a little more formal than North Shore Alliance and the expectation was that the person preaching should always wear a tie. In the summer we would relax the attire to a dress shirt (no tie), but come Labour Day, the ties would return around our necks.

But this particular Fall began differently...Labour Day came, it went, and week after week our Sr. Pastor was preaching away without a tie. There was no committee meeting, no gathering of the membership to vote, and no formal announcement...with no fanfare, ties had become a thing of the past. And so I left my tie at home that particular Sunday thinking nothing of it.

A few days after my preaching, I got a call from someone in our church; he introduced himself as Steve but I didn't recognize his name or his voice. And Steve proceeded to walk up one side of me

and down the other. He said, *You seem to be able to stand in front of people and teach without looking at your notes, I guess that must be some kind of gift, but I find you to be proud, arrogant, and sinful.*

After my initial shock, I asked him to clarify: *where do see these things at play in my life?* He responded saying: *You're wearing the wrong clothes. Excuse me? You're wearing the wrong clothes, no suit, no tie, you are wearing the wrong clothes and God will judge you for it. I just hope that your sins do not cause God's judgement to fall on your own son.* He continued like this for awhile and then hung up; he never called again. As you can imagine, I was a little angry.

A few months later, I was preaching and I happened to be wearing a suit that day, and afterwards Paul came up to talk to me. He commented on how much he liked my suit, how I was honouring God by what I wearing...and my heart starting beating faster...*this was the guy, this was "Steve," the one who spoken words of curse over me and my son.* Paul was new to the church and ended up in the singles ministry I was leading...I saw him all the time.

And each time I saw Paul became an opportunity to keep in step with the Spirit. Paul became tool in the Spirit's hands to grow the fruit of forgiveness, kindness, gentleness, and love within me. Every time I saw Paul, I was faced with a choice: to surrender to anger and bitterness, or to surrender to the life the Spirit wanted to produce within me. I didn't always surrender in the right direction, but slowly the Lord began to transform me.

For 7 weeks now we've been exploring the dimensions of intimacy with God. In that time I trust you've come to understand that intimacy with God runs much deeper than the intense feeling you

might have in the middle of a worship gathering. Intimacy is about encounter with God, but it isn't about a moment; it's about a life lived with Him and for Him. Intimacy is about the life He longs to live within us.

If you have given your life to Christ, you have not been left to fend for yourself...far from it. You have been filled with God's Personal Presence, the Holy Spirit, and He is at work right now...drawing you into intimacy and conforming your life to the image of Jesus Christ. Fruitfulness is your destiny...and you can trust the God who made you, to lead you and to complete the good work He has begun within.

**Pray**

**Communion:**

Galatians 5:1 says, *“I It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” If the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed.*

*“Free from what?”* you might ask. When Jesus died on the cross, He died carrying the weight of humanity's sin, guilt and shame. He died in our place, and three days later He rose from the dead. At the cross, our sin has been dealt with, sin's enslaving power has been broken, the spiritual forces of evil have been defeated, guilt and shame have been removed, our past has been forgiven. Jesus has set us free.

This is what we celebrate when we participate in the Lord's Supper. The broken bread reminds us of His broken body; the grape juice reminds us of the blood He shed for us. I want to invite you to come

and receive this morning, to celebrate the freedom Jesus has won for us.

And if you have never done so before, make today the day that you give your life over to the leadership of Jesus. Make today the day that you confess your need for the forgiveness He offers. Jesus said, I am **the way**, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me. Confess your need for Him and then come and join us.

At this point I would like to invite the servers to come forward. And once the servers are ready, please make your way to the front, tear off a piece of bread, dip it in the cup and celebrate what Jesus has done for us.

**Benediction/Response**

This morning, I want to speak a final word of blessing that will require some movement on your part. If you have a desire to keep in step with the Spirit, to align your character with His, then I want to invite you to come forward so that we can pray for an increased fruitfulness in your life.

You don't have to say anything, just come, let us know your name, and we will pray simply for the Holy Spirit to fill you, bless you, and make your life fruitful. There are a number of people who are ready to pray for you this morning, so let me encourage you to come and be blessed.

Brad, if you wouldn't mind, maybe keep playing for awhile...let's fill this room with worship as we pray.