

# “Fruit (& Vegetables)”

Responsive Reading, “Fruit” (appended at the end) <sup>1</sup>

Many of you know that I have been something of a vegetarian for about four and a half years. I’m not a complete vegetarian, and I’m certainly not a vegan, but I *have* cut out most of my carnivorous practices. I won’t rehearse how all that came to be, but it has been a good experience overall, so long as I’m able to get some pork barbecue from time to time!

Some of you will recognize, of course, that life in the Garden of Eden—that is, human life before the fall—was fully vegetarian, and I’ve found that I’m able to extol the virtues of the vegetarian life through reporting the six outcomes of lower weight, lower triglycerides, lower cholesterol, lower blood pressure, no need for antacids, and very little hunger. And I notice that other people, as skeptical as I used to be of the vegetarian way, would really like to experience those outcomes, vegetarian or not.

Perhaps *The Daniel Plan*<sup>2</sup> that a number of CBFers will soon undertake will bring similar benefits. I hope so. Some of those pounds I lost in the beginning have found their way back!

While you’re pondering these *vegetarian* outcomes, what would it be worth to you to experience these *spiritual* outcomes in your life: a pervading sense of peace; a sense of purpose and direction; the ability to set effective priorities; frequent if not constant joy; freedom from guilt; no fear about the future; greatly improved relationships; the ability to pray without ceasing; a virtually constant awareness of the presence of God; a sense of spiritual adventure; and making a genuine difference in both time and eternity?

Would you be interested in having those things come true in your life? I’ll bet that you would, and this morning I’m going to remind you about one of the keys that can unlock those very things in your heart.

Now while ordinary fruit and vegetables come around each year in their seasons, spiritual fruit is always in season. I’m sure you know that the most famous verses in the Bible about spiritual fruit are the words Paul wrote in Galatians 5:22-23: “*The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things.*” Wouldn’t it be a fine thing for those qualities to be true of your life nearly all the time?

Perhaps you’ve heard about the young father who took his three-year-old son to the grocery. The lad was most unhappy, strapped in the cart as he was, and he not only fussed, whimpered, and cried through the entire adventure, but he also pulled cans off the shelf and tossed things out of the shopping cart when he could reach them.

Other shoppers gave the pair a wide berth, but through it all, the young dad seemed to maintain his composure. As he made his way down one aisle after the other, he could be heard saying quietly, “Easy now, Donald. Keep calm, Donald. Steady boy. We’ll be done soon, Donald.”

A mother who came within earshot of this quiet conversation complimented the young father: “You certainly know how to remain quiet and gentle with an upset child!” she said, as she bent over to ask the boy, “What’s the matter, Donald?”

“Oh, no,” said the dad. “He’s Henry. I’m Donald!”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, Maryland, on January 19, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> [www.danielplan.com](http://www.danielplan.com)

<sup>3</sup> John Huffman, “The Fruit of the Spirit is Patience,” [www.preachingtoday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com).

Well, with Donald, you've probably discovered that the fruit of the Spirit grows best in challenging circumstances. We become more **loving** by exercising love in situations where it would be easier to be hateful. We become more **joyful** by trusting God in situations where it would be easier to become discouraged. We become more **peaceful** by trusting God in circumstances when we'd really rather be anxious or start a fight. We become more **patient** by choosing not to become irritated when circumstances or people don't change to suit us. We become more **kind** and **good** by behaving in those ways when we'd rather not.

We become more **faithful** by keeping our promises even when keeping them becomes more costly than we expected when we made them. We become more **gentle** by choosing to be gentle when it would be easier to be mean. And we become more **self-controlled** by doing all of these things again . . . and again . . . and again. We choose them and we keep choosing them until these qualities become "second nature" to us. And as we choose, we become more and more like Jesus, usually without noticing it, though others do.

We could spend a long time examining these nine character qualities, but this morning I want to focus on something I'm going to call a "spiritual vegetable," since it doesn't appear in the "fruit" list of Galatians 5. This particular veggie is especially relevant as we pray for God's Spirit to move in power among us as we complete our spiritually strategic planning process this spring and move into the near end of God's future together.

As is sometimes true with ordinary vegetables, this one requires some getting used to, and we're not usually inclined to try it until we've been persuaded of its healthful benefits. I'm speaking of a "spiritual vegetable" for which we actually pray every time we intone "the Lord's Prayer." Its name is "forgiveness."

Although I prefer the request of Matthew 6:12 as we frequently pray it—"forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us"—that's actually not what Jesus said, and I haven't been able to find a single English translation that so translates it. The "trespasses" thing appears to have originated with William Tyndale's translation of the Bible in 1526, after which it found its way into the *Book of Common Prayer*,<sup>4</sup> and it then passed from the *Book of Common Prayer* into our common speech.<sup>5</sup>

I think what you'll find in every English translation are the words "*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,*" or words to that effect. The word Jesus used has the meaning of "something owed" (οφειλήματα)—hence, "debts"—but as Jesus made clear two sentences later, the meaning of this request is really "*Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.*"

It's noteworthy that this is the only petition in the Model Prayer on which Jesus felt the need to comment. As soon as He'd finished stating this exemplary prayer, Jesus immediately added, "*If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins*" (Matthew 6:14-15).

I haven't seen the most recent Nelson Mandela film, but I did see *Invictus*,<sup>6</sup> which tells the story of how Mandela, as the first black President of South Africa, supported the nation's mostly white rugby team in an effort to bring about reconciliation in his apartheid-torn land. In one scene early in the film, we learn that Mandela's efforts at racial reconciliation did not start or stop with the rugby team. He made the most of opportunities for reconciliation wherever he found them.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bcponline.org/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://experimentaltheology.blogspot.com/2012/12/forgive-us-our-trespasses-where-d-that.html>

<sup>6</sup> *Invictus*, by John Carlin & Anthony Peckham, produced and directed by Clint Eastwood, Spyglass Entertainment, 2009.

As this particular scene begins, five black men are sitting in a small office. They are Mandela's personal security team. The leader of the team, Jason Tshabalala, says, "We need more men."

Another man asks, "Did you talk to Brenda about it?" [Brenda was Mandela's Chief of Staff.] "Yes," Jason replies. "Yesterday."

There is a knock at the door, and to the team's surprise, four white men dressed in suits enter the room. Alarmed, Jason says, "What's this!?"

"Mr. Jason Tshabalala?" one of the men says.

"That's me," Jason replies. "Am I under arrest?"

"Captain Feyder and team reporting for duty, sir."

"What duty?" Jason says.

"We're the presidential bodyguard. We've been assigned to this office." The man reaches into his jacket and takes out a sheet of paper. "Here are our orders."

Jason scans the document. "You're Special Branch, right?" [The "Special Branch" had been the secret police that brutally suppressed every effort to end apartheid.]

Captain Feyder nods, pointing to the papers. "You'll see that they've been signed."

"Well, I don't care if they are signed," Jason says. "Just wait here."

In the next scene, Jason is entering Mandela's office. "Sorry to disturb you, sir."

"You look agitated, Jason," Mandela says.

"That's because there are four Special Branch cops in my office."

"Oh? What did you do?" Mandela says.

"Nothing," Jason replies. "They say they are presidential bodyguards, and they have orders signed by you." Jason hands the papers to Mandela.

"Ah, yes," Mandela says. "Well, these men have special training. They have lots of experience. They protected de Klerk." [F. W. de Klerk was the last president of apartheid-era South Africa.]

"Yes," Jason says, "but it doesn't mean that they have to . . ."

"You asked for more men, didn't you?" Mandela interrupts.

"Yes, sir," Jason says. "I asked . . ."

"When people see me in public," Mandela interrupts again, "they see my bodyguards. You represent me directly. **Reconciliation starts here.**"

"Comrade President," Jason says, "not long ago, these guys tried to kill us. Maybe even these four guys in my office tried. And they often succeeded."

"**Yes, I know,**" Mandela calmly replies. "**Forgiveness starts here, too.** Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon. Please, Jason, *try.*"

On this weekend when we remember Dr. King, I want to share again what are to me some of the most powerful words he ever spoke on this subject:

Somehow we must be able to stand up before our most bitter opponents and say: "We shall match your capacity to *inflict* suffering by our capacity to *endure* suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws and abide by the unjust system, because non-

cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good, and so throw us in jail and we will still love you.

“Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and, as difficult as it is, we will still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hour and drag us out on some wayside road and leave us half-dead as you beat us, and we will still love you. Send your propaganda agents around the country, and make it appear that we are not fit, culturally and otherwise, for integration, and we’ll still love you.

**“But be assured that we’ll wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves; we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.”<sup>7</sup>**

Stories about forgiveness—true stories, gut-wrenching, heart-touching, world-changing stories—could be multiplied all day long, but I want to tell just one more. This one is from Beth Moore, the famous Bible teacher from Texas:

“I will never forget watching an evening talk show featuring the story of the parents of and the killer of a young college student. The killer was the victim’s best friend, and the weapon was high alcohol content inside a speeding automobile. . . .

“What made this particular story prime-time material was that the bereaved parents had forgiven the young driver . . . and if that were not enough, they had taken him in as their own. This young man sat at the table in the very chair that was once occupied by the son he killed. He slept in the son’s bed. He worked with the victim’s father . . . .

“Why did these parents do such a thing? They forgave because it gave them peace. The interviewer was amazed; I was amazed. I kept trying to put myself in the parents’ position—but I could not. And then, through my tears, I heard the Spirit of God whisper to my heart: **‘It’s no wonder you cannot relate to this story. You’ve put yourself in the wrong position. You are not the parent here. You are the driver.’**

Beth continued, “God was the parent who not only forgave, but who also invited me to sit at His table in the space His Son left for me. And when I do this, I have peace.”<sup>8</sup>

I tell these stories because a spirit of unforgiveness is one of the most frequent things that prevents God’s Spirit from coming in power, whether in an individual’s life, in the life of a congregation, in a nation, or in a world. The fact is that all of us have been wounded. Life is just like that. And some of us are probably holding on to our wounds. We’re picking off the scabs of our souls as soon as they form so that our wounds never heal—we’re “nursing” them, tending them, savoring them.

I don’t have any way of knowing whether or not that is your situation . . . but God knows, and you know. And as Mandela told Jason, “*Forgiveness starts here.*” You and I need to recognize what Beth Moore realized—that we’re sitting in the Son’s seat at the table. **We were the drivers who took His life.** *My sin did that, and yours did, too.*

When we begin to understand our real situation, our pride and our selfishness begin to melt away, so that we become able to release our offenders and their offenses, allowing God to work healing in both our heart and theirs. And so we come to our text once more:

<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Christmas Sermon on Peace,” [www.ecoflourish.com/Primers/education/Christmas\\_Sermon.html](http://www.ecoflourish.com/Primers/education/Christmas_Sermon.html)

<sup>8</sup> Beth Moore, *Living Beyond Yourself: Exploring the Fruit of the Spirit* (Nashville: LifeWay, 1998).

- *“I send out [my word] and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it” (Isaiah 55:11).*
- *“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).*
- *“When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father” (John 15:8).*

My friend, would you like to experience love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? Would you like to experience a pervasive sense of peace; a sense of purpose and direction; the ability to set effective priorities; frequent if not constant joy; freedom from guilt; no fear about the future; greatly improved relationships; the ability to pray without ceasing; a virtually constant awareness of the presence of God; a sense of spiritual adventure; and making a genuine difference in both time and eternity? Then let your grievances go and let God begin to work. **Forgive as you have been forgiven.**

Jesus didn't tell us to “Come to church every now and then and cheer for me.” He said, **“Follow me.”** The next move is yours.

# Fruit

- Reader One: *Then God said, “Let the land sprout vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing **fruit**. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.” And that is what happened (Genesis 1:11).*
- Reader Two: **“It is the same with my word,” [says the Lord]. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it” (Isaiah 55:11).**
- Reader One: *“Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their **fruit**, that is, but the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (Matthew 7:15-16).*
- Reader Two: **“A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit” (Matthew 7:17-18).**
- Reader One: *“So every tree that does not produce good **fruit** is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its **fruit**, so you can identify people by their actions” (Matthew 7:19-20).*
- Reader Two: **“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).**
- Reader One: *“The Holy Spirit produces this kind of **fruit** in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23a).*
- Reader Two: **“When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father” (John 15:8).**
- Reader One: *“We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good **fruit**” (Colossians 1:9-10a).*
- Reader Two: **“For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ’s return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God” (Philippians 1:10-11).**
- Together: **The Word of God for the People of God.**  
Thanks be to God!