

SHAPED BY SCRIPTURE

Fresh Fruit

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

June 29, 2025

The Apostle Paul is no farmer, but today he is talking about produce. That is, he is talking about what is meant to be produced in our communities, in our relationships with each other. Namely, the fruit of the Spirit.

The presence of these fruit are clear signs that the Holy Spirit is active and at work in any given community. The presence of the works of the flesh, enumerated by Paul, is a sign that that community is being led not by the Spirit, but by its own self-centered desires—what he calls the desires of the flesh.

It's a striking contrast. It's a rich metaphor. Fruit. Produce. Paul is giving us a picture of fresh fruit and rotten fruit, side by side. Of course we would say we would choose the fresh fruit. He invites us to imagine how ridiculous it would be to invite someone over and serve rotten fruit. Yet, that's precisely what Paul is saying that we do when we find ourselves engaged in those activities he characterizes as "works of the flesh." We are serving each other rotten produce.

It struck me recently that the words 'produce' and 'productivity' have the same root word, the same etymology. This realization came as I was listening to an interview with Adam Grant, who is an organizational psychologist, and his interviewee was Cal Newport, who is a computer scientist, a popular writer also of technology's impact on our work and lives.

The title of Newport's newest book is called *Slow Productivity*, and that title struck Grant as a helpful oxymoron. Productivity, by definition, is supposed to be fast and efficient. On the contrary, Newport makes the case that producing quality, meaningful work is slow and inefficient and often doesn't go according to plan. This is quite a statement, considering that Newport is

in the field—and a leader in it—of computer science, which excels at making things faster and more efficient every day.

The name of Newport's book, *Slow Productivity*, is borrowed from a movement called Slow Food. This movement began as a protest of the opening of McDonald's in Rome. The Italians preferred the slow food, painstakingly prepared, tested and refined from generation to generation, to the fast fuel available from McDonald's. Millions around the world agreed, and the Slow Food movement became a global movement.

The late pastor and author Eugene Peterson connected this idea to spiritual growth. He quipped, "If I want a potato for dinner tonight, it will do me no good to plant it this morning." Bearing the fruit of the Spirit happens, by God's grace, when we attend to the slow process of planting, of watering, of tending to the seeds of God's Word in the soil of our lives.

But what if that soil is rocky soil? What if, because of the stress and strain of our day-to-day, it becomes parched ground? What if, because of some series of events, some broken communication or fractured relationships, the soil of our lives looks inhospitable to bearing anything good?

Here we would do well to remember the words of the prophet Isaiah, where God says, "I am about to do a new thing; don't you perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness. I will bring rivers flowing through the desert."

Friends, it is precisely in the rocky and dry ground of our lives that God specializes in growing fresh fruit. We heard just a moment ago, earlier in Isaiah, "a root shall grow up from the stump of Jesse; a branch shall grow out of his roots." That is, where the community was

fractured, was down to the nub, God brings new growth. Spiritual growth. Fruit that lasts. Abiding in Christ, planted by streams of water, we can't help but grow that kind of fruit. And it is the fruit that we bear, the fruit of the Spirit, that God means to use for healing, for restoring, for bringing life into desolate places, for making all things new.

My wife, Kelly, and I started our marriage together out in New Jersey, in the suburbs of New York City. The cost of living in that neck of the woods is very high, and starting out, the only affordable apartment I could find was living above a funeral home. Not very romantic. Through the back window of our apartment, we overlooked a park, which had a stream running through it. That stream was an offshoot of the Rahway River, and it was a little canal that helped the flow of water go through that crowded neighborhood and not flood the houses nearby. It was paved with stones and concrete. One day, staring out of the back window of our apartment, I noticed in the stream bed, through the concrete and the rocks, small shoots and plants were growing through the concrete. Just busting through. The concrete didn't stand a chance against those fragile little shoots and plants. So close to the water, they couldn't help but grow, even through concrete.

The scene reminded me of how God brings growth even in those places in our lives that just seem paved over, those spaces that are inhospitable or even actively working against the flourishing and growing of life.

So, what exactly is good soil for bearing spiritual fruit? Very simply, the Apostle Paul suggests that it is a community that is led by the Spirit that will bear fruit. Like a shoot, like plants drawn to water even through concrete, communities that are led by the Spirit—even though they may be hardened or hurting or fractured—can be fertile ground that can grow Spiritual fruit that heals, that nurtures. Spiritual fruit of love that drives out hate, where light overcomes darkness, where reconciliation replaces factions, where kindness defuses quarreling, where humble hearts produce God's fruit.

Fertile soil looks like the mind and heart of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who says, "Lord, I am your servant. May it be with me according to your word." The fruit of Mary's womb was our Savior, Jesus, whose Spirit may also bear fruit in our humble and willing hearts and communities as we are led by the spirit.

May it be with us, according to God's Word. Amen.