

LESSON 1

*December 26–January 1

“By Their Fruit . . .”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 13:7–9, John 11:4, 12:28, 15:1–10, 2 Tim. 3:5.*

Memory Text: “Therefore by their fruits you will know them”
(*Matthew 7:20, NKJV*).

One of the most thrilling promises of the Lord is that if we will abide in Him and allow Him to abide in us through His Spirit, we actually will be different. Our lives will be changed, even radically.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (*2 Cor. 5:17, NKJV*).

This quarter we will study various facets of the fruit of the Spirit. The wonderful plan of salvation assures us that “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” (*2 Cor. 3:18, NKJV*).

Those who abide in Jesus always will bear fruit of the Spirit. Do you sometimes wonder if that promise really could be for you? The answer is a resounding Yes. We can be confident of this very thing, that He who has begun this good work in us will finish it (*Phil. 1:6*). Remember His words: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you” (*John 15:16, NKJV*). And the best news yet is that the good work the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives is not just for now but for eternity.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 2.*

“ ‘Every Tree Is Known by Its Own Fruit’ ”

(Luke 6:44, NKJV)

Has anyone ever asked you if you have received the Holy Spirit? Usually this is a way of discovering whether you speak in “tongues.” For them, tongues-speaking is the determining factor for whether or not you demonstrate the indwelling of the Spirit. Jesus, though, warns us about looking at certain outward signs and miracles as proof of anything. Read His clear warning in Matthew 7:21–23 (*see also Rev. 16:14*). Jesus says plainly that undeniable miracles will be performed in Jesus’ name, but that does not prove that these people are His faithful followers.

In fact, we are told that in the last days professed followers of Jesus would have a form of godliness but would deny the power thereof (*2 Tim. 3:5*).

Read 2 Timothy 3:5. How do we see this truth manifested today?

“ ‘For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush’ ” (*Luke 6:43, 44, NKJV*).

Jesus said we can know a tree by the fruit it produces. A person reveals himself or herself not so much by what he or she professes but by what he or she is. The gifts of the Spirit are given to the church for ministry. The fruit of the Spirit is given to the child of God so that his or her life might be changed.

Being a true Christian and bearing good fruit place the emphasis on being. A good actor can play the part of Mahatma Gandhi, but he can never be Mahatma Gandhi. We can look good, sound good, and even appear to do good. But unless the Holy Spirit gives us a new heart, we never can be good.

Dwell more on this distinction between doing good and being good. First, what do we mean by “good”? Second, can a person do good and not be good? Or, can a person be good and not do good? Work through your answers and bring them to class on Sabbath.

“ ‘Without Me You Can Do Nothing’ ”

(John 15:5, NKJV)

Two young boys were using a fruit tree to climb out of their second-story bedroom window and go to the swimming hole without their parents' permission. One day they heard their father say he was going to cut the tree down because it was dead. Fearing they would lose their escape route, they went to the store and bought artificial apples, which they tied to the branches of the dead tree. The next morning their father expressed amazement that apples seemed to have grown overnight, especially since the tree was a pear tree!

Read John 15:1–5 and answer the following questions:

Jesus declared Himself to be the True Vine. Why do you think He emphasized “true” vine? *(See also Matt. 24:24.)*

According to John 15:5, what does Jesus say we are? What does that mean on a practical level; that is, what does it tell us about how we should live?

Verse 4 explains that a branch cannot bear fruit unless it is connected to the vine. This is a crucial point, one that we should not miss.

Picture a branch that has fallen off an apple tree. Suppose that branch had several apples just reaching maturity. What soon happens to the branch? To the apples? Would it make any difference if we painted the apples a deep red? Suppose we watered the branch or put fertilizer on the ground around it? Would the branch continue to bear more apples if we stuck the stem into the ground? Why, then, is being connected to the trunk (the vine) essential to the branch?

How do you abide in Jesus? What does that mean? What would you have to change in your life to make this a daily experience? What practices and habits are you cultivating that make it more difficult to abide in Him?

“ ‘By This My Father Is Glorified’ ”

(John 15:8, NKJV)

“ ‘By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples’ ” *(John 15:8, NKJV)*. **What does this text mean?**

You have no doubt heard the saying, “It is possible to do the right thing for the wrong reason.” If this is true, is it possible to attempt to abide in Jesus for the wrong reason? Abiding in Jesus is not a means to an end; rather, it is an end in itself. The result of abiding in Him will be that we bear fruit, not to glorify ourselves but to glorify God. In other words, the fruit of the Spirit is not to make us look good but to make the Father look good.

Christ’s ministry, which included many miracles and good works, had a definite driving force. **What was that force, and how should this idea influence what our motives should be?** *(John 11:4, 12:28)*.

Perhaps your church is looking for ways to do things in the community that will enhance the image of the church. And that’s good. At the same time, we need to be careful about what our motives and purposes are. What’s our ultimate goal in these endeavors? Is it to glorify self or to glorify God? How can we learn to make a distinction between the two? In many ways, it can be easy to mix these things, covering even the most self-aggrandizing actions under the false veneer of “glorifying” God.

Read Matthew 5:16 and 1 Corinthians 10:31. How can we create good will and give the glory to our Father in heaven at the same time? Bear in mind that it is possible to create good will and leave the Father out, taking the credit for ourselves. Examine your own heart and ask yourself what really motivates some of your actions. How might you be fooling yourself?

“ ‘That It May Bear More Fruit’ ”

(John 15:2, NKJV)

“ ‘Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit’ ” (John 15:2, NKJV). What is this pruning process all about? How have you experienced it yourself? When that specific process ended, in what ways were you different from before it began?

At the end of every season, the farmer goes back into the vineyard and prunes away most of the vine. The farmer must be careful, however, because next year's crop is directly dependent on which parts remain. The key to pruning is the balance between the crop and vine. One is grown at the expense of the other. If you overcrop by not cutting enough away, the following year's growth will be weak and the fruit inferior. The skillful art is to find the right balance.

“God brings men into trying places to see if they will trust in a power out of and above themselves. He sees not as man sees. He often has to break up human connections and change the order which man has mapped out, which is perfect in his estimation. What man thinks is for his spiritual and temporal interests may be altogether at variance with the experience he must have in order to be a follower of Christ. His idea of his own value may be far out of the way.

“Tests are placed all along the way from earth to heaven. It is because of this that the road to heaven is called the narrow way. Character must be tested, else there would be many spurious Christians who would keep up a fair semblance of religion until their inclinations, their desire to have their own way, their pride and ambition, were crossed. When by the Lord's permission sharp trials come to them, their lack of genuine religion, of the meekness and lowliness of Christ, shows them to be in need of the work of the Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 266.

Have you ever had a trial that severely tested your faith, even to the point where you wondered if you really even had faith? Looking back, what lessons should you have learned from that experience? Most important, did you learn them?

“ ‘ “And If It Bears Fruit, Well. But If Not . . .” ’ ’ ” (Luke 13:9, NKJV)

Between 1730 and 1745 the American colonies from Maine to Georgia experienced a religious revival known as the Great Awakening. Jonathan Edwards was a leader in this movement of spiritual renewal. In July of 1741 he preached a sermon entitled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” which for some has become a symbol of the bleak, cruel, and hell-bent outlook of many Christians. However polemical, this sermon did express the truth about the awful weight of sin, the attitude of an infinitely holy God toward sin, and the surety of a day of judgment.

Read John 15:1–10. What balance does Jesus present here in the context of bearing fruit?

Notice how, on one hand, He said that if we would abide in Him we would bear much fruit, which is a product of being saved by Him. That is, if we abide in Him, by faith, we are assured of salvation because of His righteousness, which is credited to us. At the same time, He warns that if we do not abide in Him we will not bear fruit, and those who do not bear fruit will wither and at last be cast into the fire to be burned (*see 2 Pet. 3:9*).

What is the lesson to be learned from the parable Jesus told in Luke 13:7–9?

The point here is not salvation by bearing fruit, which would be just another manifestation of salvation by works. We’re not saved by bearing fruit; our fruit reveals the reality of the salvation we already have in Jesus, through faith in Him. Bearing fruit is an expression of salvation; it is not a means to attaining it. It is crucial that we understand this distinction. If not, we are sooner or later going to either become proud of what we deem our wonderful fruit, or we’re going to give up in despair at what seems to be a very paltry crop.

Further Study: “‘By their fruits ye shall know them’ (Matthew 7:20), the Saviour declared. All the true followers of Christ bear fruit to His glory. Their lives testify that a good work has been wrought in them by the Spirit of God, and their fruit is unto holiness. Their lives are elevated and pure. Right actions are the unmistakable fruit of true godliness, and those who bear no fruit of this kind reveal that they have no experience in the things of God. They are not in the Vine. Said Jesus, ‘Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the Vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing.’ John 15:4, 5.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 329.

“All who join themselves to the church but not to the Lord will in time develop their true character. ‘Ye shall know them by their fruits.’ Matt. 7:16. The precious fruit of godliness, temperance, patience, kindness, love, and charity, does not appear in their lives. They bear only thorns and briars. God is dishonored before the world by all such professors.”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 90.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** As a class, go over your answer to Sunday’s question. What is the distinction between “being” good and “doing” good?
- 2** Read carefully Ellen White’s statement about how all those who join themselves to the church but not to the Lord will soon reveal their true character. What does that mean? Why should we each ask ourselves in which category we truly belong? How can we know for sure the answer?
- 3** Imagine two folk: One is a Seventh-day Adventist who knows and believes all the doctrines—state of the dead, Second Coming, 1844, and so on. This person, however, is mean, harsh, judgmental, and unloving. There’s another person who, while professing faith in Christ, has rejected all these teachings, accepting what we would deem as theological error. Yet, this person is kind, forgiving, loving, and nonjudgmental, everything the “orthodox” Adventist isn’t. Though, of course, we don’t know hearts, if you had to guess which one was closer to the kingdom of God, whom would you choose, and why? What does your answer imply about what you deem is important in Christianity?

Wyan's Lessons in Faith

Wyan [WHY-ann] is 11 years old and lives in Pennsylvania, U.S.A. He loves God and was thrilled when his mother enrolled him in a Seventh-day Adventist school near their home.

Wyan liked his new school, especially his Bible class where his teachers answered his questions about God in ways that he could understand. Wyan invited his mother to attend a seminar the school held, and there they learned that the Sabbath was God's special day. Wyan wanted to go to Sabbath School, but his mother explained that Saturday was the busiest day at her shop. "I can't afford to close my shop to attend church," she said. Wyan prayed about it, and in time his mother decided they should trust God. She closed her shop and went to church with Wyan.

The church announced a mission trip to Central America, and Wyan wanted to go. He asked his mother to go with him, but again she explained that she didn't have the money to go and couldn't afford to close her shop for the three weeks they'd be gone.

"God will work it out," Wyan said. "We just have to trust Him." Wyan soon learned that some members were raising money so that he and his mother could go on the trip. Convinced it was God's will, Wyan's mom closed her shop and went with Wyan on the trip.

While in Central America, church members held evangelistic meetings for the adults and the children. Wyan spoke at the children's meetings, and at the end of the meetings 23 children gave their hearts to God.

But all during the mission trip Wyan's mother worried about her business. When they returned home, God had a surprise for her. In the first week that she was back in her shop, she earned enough to make up for the three weeks the shop had been closed. "And her business just keeps growing," Wyan says.



Wyan's faith helped his mother trust God too. When Wyan asked to be baptized, his mother decided to be baptized too. And to their surprise, Wyan's grandmother decided to join them.

Wyan loves to share God's love with others and urges others to do the same. "If God tells you to tell someone about Jesus, do it. Don't be afraid; just trust God, and He'll help you say the right words."

WYAN (left) lives with his mother and grandmother in Pennsylvania, U.S.A.