

HOW TO BEGIN
Live Fully
Dr. George O. Wood

This Sunday I'm beginning a new summer series "Live Fully" from the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22-23. I felt suddenly lifted in my spirit to switch out of the book of Acts and return to it another time and give this rather tightly contained series for the summer months, Living Fully.

Are you living fully? I realize there are many evidences of the full life. One of them certainly would be the fact that the fruit of the Spirit is present in our life. Some persons are biologically alive but not emotionally alive, not spiritually alive. Even Christians whose own personal life is so adulterated by other kinds of emotions, by a passive spirit or a spirit of fog, not realizing the full potential that God has for you. Not living life to the hilt. Not drawing deeply from the well of spiritual emotional and treasure that God has for you.

I'm concerned as a pastor and as a person who studies the word of God and attempts to see the presence of the Lord living in me to share with you how we can live fully. I believe that the fruit of the Spirit as described in Galatians 5 is simply another word for the quality that Jesus brings into our life. If you want to look at identifying characteristics of a person in whom Jesus is dwelling you will find them in these words which Paul writes.

Rather than reading the words as he has written them in the third person, I would like to put the words in the first person and ask you as I read these if you could say these of yourself. "I am loving. I am joyful. I am peaceful. I am patient. I am kind. I am filled with goodness. I am faithful. I am gentle. And I am self controlled." If you go around telling people that it's going to be bad for you. Don't put it in your autobiography; it will look rather self-serving. But in the hidden humility of our heart, in that place where we really realize who we are, how right it is that in the Lord we would be able to say these things of ourselves and have other people say them of us.

Jesus said in John 10:10 "I am come that you might have life and have it to the full." That's the way the New International Version translates it. Have it to the full. Not halfway alive. But fully alive.

Paul writing to the Galatians tells them that he is in travail until Christ is formed in them. The Lord wants to form himself fully in our lives.

Sometimes we're our own worst evaluator. How would I know if I'm living fully? How would I know if I'm showing the fruit of the Spirit in my life? I'd like to give you three infallible ways that you can tell whether or not you have the fruit of the Spirit in your life.

First is to take these traits that I have just provided for you – loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, etc. Write them down on a sheet of paper, all nine of them and take them to somebody who's closest to you. A wife, a husband, a child, a parent, a real close friend, and say, "Would you agree with me that I am these things? And be honest with me."

HOW TO BEGIN

Live Fully

That's one good test right away. People have been waiting for years to tell you exactly what they thought in certain areas. You've never given them the opportunity. Go out from this service and use that as an opportunity to enjoy a genuine conversation in your household.

A second infallible way that you know whether or not you have the fruit of the Spirit is how you react when you are stepped on. The fruit of the Spirit show themselves best when we are under stress, pressure or adversity.

Our life is like the cup that someone carries in their hand. If you bump them whatever is in the cup spills out. When someone bumps us out will come something. Out will come love and joy and self-control. Or out will come anger, sarcasm, bitterness, hatred, self-pity. Whatever is in the cup, adversity will always reveal it and reveal it very plainly.

Paul was a person who was kicked around a lot. In fact, most Bible scholars think that the letters to the Galatians is written to the churches that Paul founded on the first missionary journey. That journey was a hard journey. It was a journey, which after it had been under way just a few weeks had this split occurred with John Mark leaving. Then Paul fell ill. He writes the Galatians telling them "You know I first came to you because I was sick." That makes sense given the geographical climate of the area to which Paul was writing. Many times people contracted a high malarial type fever on the coastlands and would come up north to recuperate. So he says when I came to you it wasn't on my itinerary. It wasn't because I planned it. It was because I got sick and that's why I found myself in your midst.

Then he goes to the towns – Antioch of Presidia, Iconium, Lystra, and finally Derbe. In the first three towns he is forcibly expelled from. He's persecuted from place to place. In Lystra he is taken outside by a mob and they rain down stones upon him until they think he's dead and then they leave him. He could have well gotten up from that adversity bitter in his spirit and clenched his fists as he feebly declared "When I get my strength back, I'll get even with you for this! God will send you to hell for this!" But the fruit of the Spirit grew in him in that very difficult terrain of South Galatia.

We must not therefore think of the fruit of the Spirit that it's something kind of optional. That nice people having a nice day in nice work with nice families living in nice houses can have. They have time to have love. They have time to be joyful. They have to have the fruit of the Spirit. But out in the trenches where the sweat is rolling and where the boss is cursing and where somebody in your family is giving you fits and where something very unjust has just happened to you that is the place where the fruit of the Spirit best develops and is manifest.

So we look at the cup of our life and we see how we respond when we get hit real hard.

The third way to take inventory of the presence of the fruit of the Spirit in your life is monitor your speech. Your speech will give you away every time. Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." If encouraging and helpful speech arises from you it is a sign of patience and joy and self-control. If your speech is laced with edginess, ill temperedness, anger, sarcasm. I realize there is a place for the proper display of anger and I don't want to be categorized as saying that all anger is bad. There is a place for the proper demonstration of it under the right controls manifested by the Lord himself. But a tendency to abuse persons and objects with speech. To abuse family members, to abuse friends, to abuse others in the church

HOW TO BEGIN

Live Fully

with negative, cutting, sarcastic speech is a sign that the fruit of the Spirit is not present to any great extent if at all.

We can all inventory our lives. Some in this audience will do better than others. But all can improve. Ask somebody else. Evaluate the last time that something really bad happened to you and how you handled it. And third, what's coming out in your speech. That will kind of give you a clue as to the depth of need.

I'm not going to be able fully how to develop in all the fruit of the Spirit. That will be the subject of the next nine weeks. This morning is just kind of introductory. We talk about how do we get the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. I think it's well to look at that to avoid some confusions about developing the fruit of the Spirit. I find among believers three general confusions about the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit in our life.

One confusion is that doctrinal orthodoxy produces the Christian lifestyle automatically. That is if you can cross every statement on the doctrinal catechism, then you must be living the Christ-life. No, that doesn't mean you're living the Christ life. It may mean that you're adhering to it the Christ truths. But there is such a thing not only as heresy in doctrine, there is heresy in lifestyle.

Sometimes I have gone through a doctrinal checklist and checked everything in agreement but I just had a bad argument with my wife and I don't want to say, "I'm sorry" because I was at fault. I think that at times it's easier to be doctrinally orthodox than it is to be lifestyle orthodox. I'm not knocking doctrinal orthodoxy. But at the same time I realize that the fruit of the Spirit is not necessarily guaranteed by doctrinal orthodoxy.

True creed does effect conduct. If Christ does dwell in us richly, if our conduct is more than just checking off statements, if Christ is really in us the Christ life will be produced.

I've seen believers that I've never worried in terms of doctrine. But I've gotten much worried when I saw how discourteously they treated people and how other things have happened which would indicate a Spirit in whom Christ is not yet fully formed. I get troubled at myself periodically.

The second confusion about the fruit of the Spirit is the distinction between the Spirit in someone and upon someone. Simply because the Spirit is upon someone does not mean the Spirit is richly dwelling in someone. The Spirit comes upon us to empower us to be a witness of the Lord, to empower us to be the vehicles through whom the gifts of the Spirit which are the credentials of Christ miracle power are released in the world. Upon someone but not necessarily *in* someone.

Jesus talking to false prophets at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:19-20 recounts the day when people will stand before him who in effect have had the Spirit upon them. They have preached, they have cast out demons, they have healed the sick but they have not had the Spirit, which is the life of Jesus in them. He will say to them in that day, By their fruit you will know them.

One of the dangers people like myself really have that have a particular teaching gift that is visible to the body is that we may begin to confuse our gift with fruit and think that our gift then

HOW TO BEGIN

Live Fully

entitles us to live any way we want. It doesn't. God is not at all when I stand before him measure me by whether or not I have the gift of teaching. He is going to measure me by my fidelity to his life, by my personal commitment to him and by what was happening on the inside.

One of the amazing things is God uses all of us imperfect vessels and the Spirit upon a person does not guarantee that the Spirit is in them.

I was intrigued by something I read recently that had to do with persona. A persona is something you put on. The image. The temptation in all of our spiritual life is put the persona on at the times it's needed so we will look pretty good to other people. Good fruit and true fruit only comes from the root. Ultimately there must be a line of communication between the fruit and the root. Our dwelling in our devotional life and our emotional life and our inner being must be anchored, rooted in Christ.

The Corinthian church we know was great on the theme "The Spirit upon you." They judged the Spirit's working by what was happening on the exterior in terms of the manifestation of the gifts. Paul never discourages the exercise of the gifts. But he says at the close of his teaching in that section of 1 Corinthians 12 "You are earnestly desiring the greater gifts but I still show to you a more excellent way." The more excellent way was the Spirit in them than simply upon them.

A third confusion exists in regard to the fruit of the Spirit is that sometimes the fruit is seen as something plural rather than singular. Paul does not say the *fruits* of the Spirit, but rather the *fruit* of the Spirit. It is the gifts of the Spirit – plural – and the fruit of the Spirit – singular.

Why is that important? It's important because the gifts will not be manifested by all believers. Paul explicitly says this in 1 Corinthians 12. Some have one gift and some have another. The whole body together possesses all the gifts but no one person has them all. With rare exception. I think maybe the Apostle Paul had them all functioning, at least I see evidences for them in his life. But most believers do not have all the gifts functioning.

So the gifts are sort of like a cafeteria smorgasbord. They are a combination given to you by God's direction and by your desire. The two working together. But the fruit of the Spirit is not a smorgasbord. It is not going up and saying, "I like the green beans but I don't like the asparagus."

I'd look at a cafeteria kind of choice and say, "I'd like love – especially if I am the one being loved, and joy – good things happening to me, that brings joy. I'd like peace. Patience? What do you have to do to get patience? You have to have people that make you patient to get patience. You have to have circumstances that go against you to develop patience. I'll skip patience. Kind? Yes, I want to be kind. Self controlled? I think I'd rather see someone else to have self control. I enjoy losing mine every now and then."

Fruit of the Spirit. All of us having it all together, all the time. Showing together that we are the Lord's.

How does this begin to happen? Those of us in the pulpit have a way of laying a lot of obligations on people who may not have the knowledge, the ability or in some cases the desire to do something. The temptation is to go for the self-effort route. That seems the easiest and the

HOW TO BEGIN

Live Fully

cleanest. I've found that the fruit of the Spirit developed in our life as a result of two things basically that come together. Paul articulates it in Philippians 2:12-13 "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to do his good pleasure." I am working and God is working. These two must go together. If God does all the work and I simply wait passively nothing ever happens. But if I do all the work and do not depend on the indwelling life of Christ in me then I become very guilt ridden. This is a problem of emphasis that place great stress on human obedience and living victoriously and cleansing out sin. All those vital topics, all those things we ought to be doing but if over emphasized and the grace of God under emphasized the person become guilt ridden, guilt oriented and unable to live freshly and dynamically in the Lord and finally become convinced that they can't live the Christian life so they might as well quit.

Many of my friends as teenagers tried hard to live the Christian life but still had some imperfection or something that would go wrong and ultimately decided they couldn't live the Christian life. So they checked out not realizing it is in the context of God's grace that we grow. It is God's life in us and us then responding. Scriptures never say that Christian growth is automatic. We know it's not automatic because we're given continual admonition in the scripture along certain areas that have to do with our obedience and will. But the two working together.

Fruit will never grow on a dead tree. Christ must be alive in us through first the new birth and then the nurturing of his life in us. The problem is not with the seed. The problem is in the climate it was exposed to. That's an apt analogy to explain the relationship of Jesus Christ to our life. If we're not growing in him, if we're not expressing fruit, the problem is never in the seed. It's never Christ. Given the climate, his life will always grow in us. But there are some things we can do to alter the climate and make his growth impossible in us. By not keeping around us an attitude and habit and perspective of prayer, of growing through his word, of fellowship with his people, of involvement in service to him, of conscious repeated desire to please him and to become obedient as a disciple of his. Give the Lord full priority in your life, practice a climate in which his presence is at easy and at home. Christ living in us.

How would Jesus address the situation that you're facing? How would he talk? What would be the tone of his voice? What would be his gestures? What would be his actions? What would he say? How would he face the people that you're facing, the people that you're living with, the people that you're working with? The Lord will reveal that to you as you open your heart to practice his presence and encourage the development of his life in you. The seed of Christ, the life of Christ comes into us by grace when we confess him through faith and repent of our sins. But that life is nurtured as we love him and respond with open arms to his influence upon our life.

Our Father, we remember the promise of your Son our Lord that "If you abide in me and I din you, you will bear much fruit." Statistics along, Lord, would suggest that in an audience of this size there are persons who are living very fractured lives because the fruit of the Spirit has not been present. In a moment in their own life when you wanted to express your love they gave way to anger. In a moment when you wanted patience, they gave way to impulse like Esau. In a moment when you sought to bring self-control they lost control. In a moment when they could have had healing speech, hurting speech came through instead. Lives have been disrupted and families have been hurt and wounds have been rendered.

HOW TO BEGIN

Live Fully

Lord, we place ourselves now before you asking for the healing of your grace. A silent affirmation of love in our hearts for you – a prayer, a petition. God, help me to live fully. Help me to love fully. Help me to joy fully. Help me to show peace and be at peace fully. Help me to be faithful fully, to be patient, fully. To be kind fully. To show goodness fully. Gentleness fully. Self control fully. Thank you, Lord, for your life so beautifully lived. So beautifully living now. We want, Lord, to be the people that bear the marks and evidences of your personality. Search us and try us and see if there is any wicked way in us and cleanse us from all our sin. May we live full. In your name. Amen.