

# THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

A Life Changed by Jesus

## WEEK SIX: Philemon 8-21

### The Fruit of the Spirit: A Brief Introduction

This term we will be focusing on what a life changed by Jesus looks like using the metaphor of the fruit of the Spirit. This common biblical metaphor describes the outcomes of a life lived with God; the virtues and characteristics that ought to be the harvest of our lives.

Our central text will be Galatians 5:16-23 but we'll also incorporate other texts that reflect on fruitfulness.

### Sermon Outline:

#### A Brief Overview of This Week's Sermon

**Key Text(s):** Philemon 8-21

In the brief epistle to Philemon Paul advocates for Onesimus. Philemon is a man of some standing in the Colossian community of faith – the fact that he hosts a church in his home suggests he was quite wealthy. Philemon has come to faith, apparently through the ministry of Paul (v. 19), and has been a key partner with Paul in his gospel mission (v. 1, 6, 13, 17, 22). As would have been normal for a prominent man in Colosse, Philemon had slaves as part of his household. One of these had been Onesimus (v. 15-16).

It appears that Onesimus had run away from Philemon – the reason he and Philemon had been separated (v. 15) – and that he had perhaps stolen from his master when he left (v. 18). While we don't know the exact circumstances, Onesimus had met Paul when the apostle was in prison and had become a Christian (v. 10).

We can't know when or how Paul learned that Onesimus was a runaway slave of his dear friend Philemon, only that it would have led to an awkward reunion! A runaway slave would normally have been punished and, if theft were also involved, the punishment might be quite severe. In an honour/shame culture there would have been certain social expectations and pressures shaping Philemon's response. One indicator of the serious nature of the consequences is evidenced by the strength of Paul's appeal – it is quite rhetorically powerful! Keep in mind that this letter would likely have been brought by Onesimus and read aloud to the church that met in Philemon's home.

The basis of Paul's appeal is love (v. 5, 7, 9) but the essence of his appeal is, indirectly, that Philemon demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit: peace, forbearance, kindness, and goodness. Recall that Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit was given in a context of relational conflict in Galatia. The situation he addresses with Philemon is similar because he is asking, it seems, for Philemon to forgive Onesimus, cancel his debt, and set him free (v. 12-13). Furthermore, he is asking Philemon to treat Onesimus as an equal – like Paul himself (v. 17).

For this to happen Philemon will be required to set aside his desire for justice/vengeance, his sense of privilege and dishonour, the expectations of his social peers, the former ways he interacted with Onesimus, the impulse to shame him, etc.

Sometimes being fruitful is as much about what we set aside as it is about what we put on! Like a sapling tree that requires the removal of weeds, stones, pests, and other obstacles to flourish, we sometimes need things removed to bear the fruit of the Spirit.

In our lives together we must remain in step with the Spirit and consider those practices and attitudes we can put on and those practices and attitudes we can put off!

We don't know how Philemon responded, though we have some clues! Someone named Onesimus is listed among Paul's companions in Colossians 4:9 which suggests that Philemon did all that Paul had asked. Church tradition also suggests that Onesimus may have become the bishop of Ephesus (as recorded by an early church father). And of course, we have the letter itself which, if Philemon had rejected Paul's request, you can't imagine would have been kept!

## Questions to Ask

1. What stood out to you about Paul's appeal to Philemon?
2. What are some of the weeds (e.g., attitudes and practices) that inhibit the fruit of the Spirit in our lives?
3. Share a time that you have had a Philemon experience; a time you had to lay aside your rights in order to restore another? What was the most difficult aspect of that experience?
4. Rox reminded us that an important function of fruit is multiplication. How do our actions of peace, forbearance, kindness, and goodness multiply in ourselves and others?
5. What is one attitude or practice that you can put on/take off this week in order to foster one of these four fruits?

## A Prayer to Pray

Pray for each other and for our community of faith that the fruit of joy (and love) might become more and more evident in our lives.

## A Practice to Try

We were challenged to ask the Spirit to reveal one of the fruits that he desires a harvest of in our lives. Make this a focus of prayer this week.

## Readings to Read This Week

The following readings reflect further on peace, forbearance, kindness, and goodness. Consider the ways the stories reflect a laying down that brings about these "fruit".

- Genesis 50:15-21
- 1 Samuel 25:1-35
- 2 Samuel 9:1-13
- Acts 9:26-28; 11:22-26
- 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

## A Mission Commitment to Reflect on

Our vision as a community of faith is to see lives changed by Jesus. In this series we want to consider what that really means – what does a life changed by Jesus look like?

## A GBC Initiative to Promote/Celebrate

Each week we will provide you with a key aspect of our community news that we would encourage you to remind your Life Group about.

1. The Hopefield/GBC Giving Tree launched on Sunday. Our target is \$9000 to provide Christmas hampers to those doing it tough in our wider community. Any excess will go to other support services.
2. Our AGM I is on Sunday November 30 after the service. This is the meeting where we pass our budget for 2026 and appoint members of the Church Council and Elders. Please remind your group to have a look at the documentation and to attend on the 30<sup>th</sup> – either onsite or online.
3. Next week's Life Group Resource will be the final of 2025.