

Fruit From a Horticulturist

After a recent class in which the fruit of the Spirit was discussed, I was approached by Laura Aschenbeck with some wonderful observations from her work as a horticulturist. Laura agreed that I could share her examples observed in nature and add some applications. Her observations are in regular text; mine in *italics*.

Growing fruit costs the plant an enormous amount of energy. Think about the amount of calories/energy in an apple. Now think about eating the leaves or bark off the apple tree: terrible taste and you wouldn't get many calories for your efforts. Plants that produce fruit put much more energy, flavor, scent, design and color into their fruit than into themselves. Plants 'want' their fruit to be taken - whether by animal, person, wind or water - to where it can grow, spread and multiply itself. It doesn't matter that energy is hard to come by, sunlight via photosynthesis being the only source. Plants that live year after year do store energy to survive the winter dormancy and come back in the spring, but fruit and seeds are the major channel into which collected energy is funneled.

This illustrates the principle taught by Jesus in the parable of the lost sheep. The shepherd considered the value of one lost sheep and went to the greatest extent to insure that it was found. As Christians, we must consider the great value of people to God. He gave his only son as for us. How much energy, time, or money will we give for lost sheep?

Fruit is a vehicle for seeds: future plants. Fruit, while the plant spends an enormous amount of energy on it, is not the main focus. It is simply a means of transportation for the seed(s). The plant's 'goal' by producing fruit is to provide opportunities for more plants like itself to germinate and grow. The fruit itself is used up in the process: eaten or decomposed. It is not the lasting result; a germinated seed is the result of a 'successful' fruit.

Did you ever think of yourself as the fruit of someone else's efforts in the Lord? While each Christian is directly connected to the Lord; someone was your teacher, a striking example in your life, someone who encouraged you. God used other Christians to plant seeds of Christianity in the 'soil of your heart.' You, in turn, are constantly dropping seed on the many types of soil around you. Nature illustrates the way in which we become a spiritual plant, how we grow and mature, and then how we produce fruit for the Lord. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." (1 Cor 3:6 NIV)

The plant has no control over which fruit/seeds become another plant. Plants are not concerned with which specific fruits/seeds are successful; they focus on producing as much good fruit/seed as they can. The more fruits/seeds the plant produces, the better chance that some survive.

Do you try to evaluate the 'soil' of other people's hearts? Jesus did not. He preached, taught, healed, and helped people in all walks of life. He never looked at someone and decided that they were not a good 'prospect.' He simply planted seed. Paul said that he made himself "a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible." (1 Cor. 9:19 NIV) To the Jews he behaved in such a way that he would not offend the Jews. For the non-Jew he did the same, as well as for the weak. He was not hypocritical, but tolerant; all for the purpose of planting seeds of Christianity. Just like a plant in nature we cannot be concerned about the kind of 'soil' on which the seed of our fruit falls.

There are many kinds of fruit. Each plant species produces a different kind of fruit. Each is well-adapted to its environment (assuming natives in their natural habitat) and designed specifically to be carried by a certain means. Whether by animal, wind, water, or person, each fruit/seed has a successful but often unique way of traveling and becoming another plant.

You are the 'touch of Christ' in your world. You touch your family, friends, fellow Christians, coworkers, neighborhood acquaintances, and many others. All Christians are connected to Jesus Christ, 'the vine.' So, we all produce the fruits of the Spirit as we touch lives around us. However, because of our different strengths and weaknesses, each one is unique. The Apostle Paul was uniquely suited to carry the gospel to the Gentile world. The other Apostles were better suited to work among the Jews. In the same way that nature distributes her seeds in unique ways, you may be uniquely suited to plant the seeds of Christianity in the life of someone you know.

Nature does not think about producing fruit, nor does it care about where it falls. As we walk in the Spirit, we will produce fruit where ever we are as a natural outcome of being a part of the 'true vine' Jesus Christ. God will be glorified and he will 'make it grow.'

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