

GOALS
Lent Sermon Series on the Fruit of the Spirit
Love
Galatians 5:22-23
1 John 4:7-19
March 1, 2020

We're kicking off a new series of messages that follow on the heels of the first two series of messages that we've done here in 2020 in an effort to enhance our spiritual fitness. First, we talked about the need we all have to stretch ourselves a bit. Most of us were willing to admit that we're not where we'd like to be when it comes to our spiritual fitness...we'd all like to get better, stronger, deeper in our connection with God and the way we follow Him. In February we looked at the fitness tools we can use to build up our spiritual fitness. Things like prayer and meditation and daily devotions can all be used to build us up spiritually. They are the bench presses and tread mills of our spiritual work outs.

And starting today we're going to take a look at the evidence of our hard work. Everyone knows that hard work produces evidence, right. In the best cases the evidence of our hard work is a better product, a more exact number, more widgets at the end of the day, a deeper level to a relationship that we're working on, or more quality time with the people we love. **We all hope that the evidence of our hard work is "more."** We don't work hard for something less...that's just not worth it to most of us. We work hard hoping that at the end of the day, at the end of the pay period, at the end of the year we have more...not less. As a matter fact, there are entire tv shows dedicated to helping people who are working hard but not producing more. I was watching one the other day called *Restaurant Impossible*. The show, maybe you know the show, involves an expert at running restaurants **named [Pic of Robert Irvine and logo of Restaurant Impossible]** Robert Irvine who comes into a struggling situation and turns it around. On this particular show he took the struggling owners aside and pointed out that they spent \$35k running the restaurant that year and made \$25k in return. Now, that's a \$10k loss for all the hard work and lots and lots of hours they will never get back.

So, what are the results we gain if we work hard on our spiritual lives? Because there should be results...right. We thought it would be good for us to point out what the evidence of our hard work would look like to both those who know us best or those who just casually run into us. Either way, people should see the evidence of our spiritual workouts. In effect, we want to talk about "the more" that is produced in you that becomes the evidence of the Spirit's presence in you to the world around you. What I mean is...if you are doing the spiritual heavy lifting that Jesus has challenged us to do then the people who meet us will see the evidence of that hard work by how we act or react, what we say or don't say, you know what I'm getting at right. It's kind of like knowing that we can all see the **[Pic of Arnold and Jason Mamoa]** evidence of Arnold's or Jason Mamoa's hard work. And I want to be real with you...God is looking for some spiritual body builders who are going to change the world around us and make it hard to go to hell from Harrisburg. So, if you're in...we're kick this off. Ready? Let's go...

We're going to look at what the Bible says in Galatians is the evidence of our spiritual workout. Each week between now and Easter Sunday we're going to look at the nine different signs of our spiritual fitness that are supposed to be easy to spot in every believer in Jesus. In Galatians chapter 5, verses 22-23 there is a list of spiritual muscles that we should be developing. Now, let me be clear...all of these are a part of the spirit living in us. Because the Holy Spirit lives in us – all nine should be seen, there should be evidence of all nine. To avoid one or to deny another is like working on your arms and back and shoulders but never working out your legs. **We're called to exhibit all nine!** No excuses! And man, do we come up with excuses. We say things like...well, that's not my gift or that's not my strong suit. Look, these are not the gifts of the spirit...those are difference and are found primarily in 1 Corinthians 12. These are the fruit of the Spirit or the signs of the Spirit or the show and tell of our connection with God. So, let's dive in and start looking at the spiritual muscles with the first on the list...

The first one on the list of spiritual evidence items is not more important than the others but, it's certainly one that we can all say is vital to the entire list. While there does not seem to be a hierarchy to this list it is important to notice that love comes first. These nine attributes are the "*evidence of the presence*" of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised He would send when He left the earth and in effect, put His followers in charge. These nine are the signs of that Spirit living in each of us. So, since the Holy Spirit is the spiritual presence of God living in us...then it would be appropriate for the first one to be love since God is love and the Holy Spirit is God in us, one of the three parts of the Trinity. All of the rest of these attribute, if not done out of love, could easily be contrived or faked. And worse yet, they could be used to trick us or lure us into a place of false hope or fake faith. So, God tells us through this guy named Paul that we are to love.

This is the same guy who says in 1 Corinthians 13 what love is and what love is not. We hear that passage read a lot at weddings. But, let me just read this first part of us so that we understand that if we are going to live out the fruit of the

Spirit then, it must be done with love. Take a listen: ***If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. ³ If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.*** He's telling us that this first attribute is essential to all of the others or all the others can go wonky without it. **Love is the foundation**, the cornerstone, the bedrock! Makes sense, right?

So, let's talk about love. Jump back over with me to Galatians 5 and before this fruit of the Spirit part is written in verses 22&23, God makes sure that we are reminded of something Jesus said to all of us. In Gal 5 verse 13-15 it says: ***¹³ For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. ¹⁴ For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.*** We're reminded that Jesus summed up all 614 of the Old Testament laws into one statement...Love your neighbor as yourselves. So, all of the evidence of God in us should be done in and out of love. Since love is an action and all of these attributes are actions on our part...then the primary, driving action is love so that people can see and experience God...who is love.

Okay, so, jump over to **1 John chapter 4** with me for a moment and look at what God says about love through this guy names John. Now, this John is thought to be the same one as the guy who wrote the Gospel of John. And you've heard me say that if you're going to read on of the gospel's, read John...that it's a love story about how Jesus and John connected with each other. John refers to himself as "the disciple Jesus loved." Bold, huh! But, that's what he believed. He was convinced, because of how Jesus acted toward him and treated him that Jesus had an Agape' and phileo love for John. Agape meaning unconditional and phileo meaning brotherly.

And the result of that connection is John writing this: ***⁷ Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*** So, the first of the nine evidential elements of the presence of God in us is love. So, how does love work for you. Is it just an emotion? Is it something you fall into and out of? Is love a word you use flippantly like – man I love steak? Is love something that you allow to be the center of your actions. Look, if you're doing things out of love then people should feel the love, right. People around you should sense that there is a heart and soul coming through your words and actions. It says right here that if don't love, we don't know God because God is love.

But, if we believe what it says in verse 13, that: ***...God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us.*** Then everything we do is to be permeated with and centered out of God's love. How do we do that? We said that we were going to make things practical during this year of advancing our spiritual maturity so, how do we put some practical tools in our spiritual lives that will help us exhibit God's love, this first of the nine evidences of the presence?

First, we need to connect with the One who is love. How can we know what love looks like if we don't know the One who is love? Look at 1 John 4:20: ***²⁰ If someone says, "I love God," but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? ²¹ And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers.*** Daily prayer and devotions, weekly worship, getting together with other believers are all ways we can stay connected to the One who loves us.

Second, we need to check our motives. Everything we do should be done only after we've stopped, took inventory, checked why we're doing it, and ask what we're hoping to have as a result. If the desired result is self-serving or self-gratifying then it's tough to put it into the category of love. If it is for an undeserved gain and to get something for nothing...we've got to raise a flag. But, if our motives are for someone else to feel important, someone else to get the applause, for someone to receive the honors...then those things sound more like things done with love as the motivation. It's a matter of first asking ourselves – "why am I doing this."

Those two, practical yet, challenging tools are ways we can get on track with what God wants for all of us...to be His light in the world by being a living example of the God we believe in.