

“THAT YOU MAY BEAR FRUIT FOR GOD.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

June 23, 2024, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Galatians 5:22-25; Romans 7:4

Introduction.

Welcome again to SERVE week. We have been planning and preparing and praying for you for many months.

We started several months ago having prayer meetings for you. Each of you has at least one prayer partner. You will have an opportunity to meet some of them at lunch today. We will continue to be praying for all of you this week and we encourage all of you to enter into daily prayer for what God wants to do in and through you and with all of us together.

Does your life matter?

If you are a normal human being, at some point during the course of your life, however long or short that life may be, you have given some thought to that great existential question, does the fact of my existence on earth actually make any difference. Of course, you didn't know it was an existential question, you are not even sure you can spell existential let alone define it.

Existential questions are questions that have to do with existence, with the meaning, purpose, and value of our human existence. There are over seven billion people wandering around on the planet earth right now, does my individual life really make any difference at all?

Are we like so many ants, scurrying around, living our lives doing our little human things, only to die and be no more and not matter any more whether we lived or not.

Do our lives matter? What impact will my life or your life have beyond our family and small circle of friends? Probably no one will write our biography, no one outside of Washington or Minnesota or British Columbia will ever know about us, and certainly not remember us two hundred years from now. None of us will end up in any history books to be read in school a century from now.

Do our lives matter? I can tell you this, when you go searching for the answer to that question, it really matters where you go and who you ask? If you go to the world for answers you will end up depressed and confused. It may tell you what you want to hear and build you up for a little while but in the end, it will drop you like a rock. If you turn to social media, it will leave you depressed and confused, happy one minute and sad the next, liked one minute, unliked the next.

Your life matters.

Does your life matter? That is the question. If you ask the right person, you will get the right answer. Let me give you an absolutely clear and definitive answer. Your life matters because your life matters to God. When all is said and done, your life matters to the only person who matters. Your life matters to God.

Now someone is probably saying, “Yeah, right, pastor. But you don’t know me, I am nobody, hardly anybody knows me, I am not that smart or good looking. I will never be rich or famous, no one cares about what I do or think.” None of that matters, you matter to the only person who matters, you matter to God.

I know that may sound crazy to some of you, I know you can’t bring yourself to believe your small, little life matters in the grand, cosmic scheme of the universe, but I am here to tell you your life and everything about it, your thoughts, feelings, emotions, your attitudes and actions, your rising up and your lying down, every second of your existence are all known by God and matter to God.

Why your life matters.

Your existence at this moment in time and space was personally and purposefully designed by God. If God did not do this you would not be here. You are not an accident, a mistake, an afterthought. From before the creation of the earth, God thought about you and when and where and why you would exist. He picked this time and place for you.

You are absolutely unique in all the earth, there is no one else like you. You have a unique purpose, a unique place, a unique relationship to those around you. You are custom made, custom designed for this exact time and place in history.

There are things God wants you to know and do, purposes that He wants you to fulfill, and a life He wants you to live, a contribution He wants you to make in this world.

Psalm 100:3 Know that the Lord, he is God!

It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Psalm 139:13, 16 For you formed my inward parts,
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Acts 17:28 “‘In him we live and move and have our being’ ... ‘For we are indeed his
offspring.’”

He is the one who thought of you even before He created anything. Every moment of
your life matters because it was created and given to you by God and it is eternal and has
eternal value.

Bear good fruit.

But that’s not the end of the matter. God didn’t just put you here to exist, to just live and
do your own thing and then die. God created and saved you to do good works, to bear
good fruit.

Romans 7:4 ... [Christ] has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for
God.

Your life matters because of the cross, Jesus shed His blood for you, He ransomed you,
He bought and paid for you, He saved you from sin and death so you could belong to
Him.

Ephesians 2:10 We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which
God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Listen to that again and soak it in, it is the eternal truth of God, something the world will
never say. [] Someone may say we are a piece of work, and that’s right, we are God’s
piece of work.

Regardless of how you may view yourself, God’s view is He has created you to bear
good fruit for Him. Yes, you, and yes, for God. How you live your life matters to God.

If you are a follower of Jesus, He has saved you and forgiven you and put His Holy Spirit
in you so you can “bear fruit” for him. and not just on Serve week, but all your life.
Your life matters, that you are here now matters, and what you do after you leave here
matters.

Fruit of the Spirit.

Let's dig a little deeper into this fruit business. Notice it is fruit, not fruits, so the whole list comprises the evidence and influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It's a package deal. But we can talk about them as individual fruits as well.

For those of you who want to try to commit these to memory there is a simple way that helps. The first three are one syllable, the second three are two syllables, the third three are three syllables.

The first three are general Christian virtues that are Godward in focus. They are all things God does and gives, and enables us to reflect back to Him and others.

The second three are social virtues that are manward in focus. They reflect personal growth in our relationships with others. Not rushing, forcing, coercing, pushing, shoving.

The third three are internal, they are selfward in focus.

When you hear this list of nine Christian virtues what do you think? What are you tempted to do with this list? Who here would say they exhibit all these virtues? How about six out of nine?

Can we be honest? This list makes us feel uncomfortable, inadequate. The list is intimidating, humbling. This is the sort of list you want to read quickly and then move on. Let's talk about something else less guilt producing. This list convicts us and let's face it we don't like to be convicted.

What would you say is your least fruit and what is your most fruit?

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Where does fruit come from?

It comes from life. Fruit is not something that is made, as in manufactured or engineered or using sophisticated technology. Fruit is the result of life. God is the God of life and He is fruitful, everything He does is fruitful, every living thing He made is fruitful.

A person living by faith in God, abiding in Jesus, walking by the Spirit will produce fruit.

We don't produce it by our own efforts, but by our surrendering to and submitting to and prayerfully pursuing and welcoming the work of the Holy Spirit. The fruit is by faith depending on grace.

When Paul commands us to live by the Spirit and walk by the Spirit he is commanding us to do something, not in our own power, but in Someone else's power, by God's enabling grace.

Romans 8:5-6 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

We are either bearing fruit for death or bearing fruit for life. To do the later we must crucify the flesh and cultivate fruit. You Serve participates are going to dig into this fruit this week. Let me just give a quick summary of them by asking a question about each of them.

Love: Do you work to seek the highest good for others, even when others are unloving?

Joy: Do you delight in the good in others? Not from circumstances, from world?

Peace: Do you strive to maintain the unity, even at significant personal cost?

Not being contentious, quarrelsome, divisive, stirring up strife.

Comes from deep confidence all things are in God's hands.

Patience: Are you growing in your ability to overlook offenses?

Restraining anger when wronged, when things don't go your way.

This is God's attitude toward us, forbearing, forgiving.

Kindness: Do you not only overlook offenses, but also repay them with kindness?

Goodness: Do you look for opportunities to be helpful, doing good?

Faithfulness: Do you do what you say you'll do, even in the smallest matters?

Are you trustworthy, reliable?

Gentleness: Do you use your strength to serve the weak, are you considerate, teachable?

Self-control: Do you have self-mastery, do you refuse your flesh's cravings?

Illustrations:

As gardener must water and tend to the plants to help them grow, so you must nurture these qualities through prayer, studying the Word, and living a Christ-centered life. Over time, these virtues will grow and become more evident in your actions and interactions with others. Like gardening, spiritual fruit does not happen overnight, it is a slow ongoing process all of our life. Trust that God, who began a good work in you, will carry it on to completion (Philippians 1:6).

Fruit takes time, character takes time. Be patient, trust the work of the Holy Spirit. Seek and pray, work and wait, trust and obey. It is a long obedience in the same direction. It is the work of a lifetime.

John 15:1, 4-5 I am the true vine, ... 4 As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Where Jesus is, there the Spirit is, there you will see fruit. The fruit will flourish in the soil of God's Word and in worship and prayer.

Fruit that is not connected to the vine will spoil, so will our fruit if we are not connected to Christ by the Holy Spirit.

This week at Serve there will be an emphasis on being and staying connected to the vine of Christ so that you will receive from Him what you need to grow in your spiritual fruit and be enabled to bear good fruit as you serve, work and interact with each other and how you treat others, on the worksites, at meals, living and sleeping in close proximity to each other.

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Being connected to the vine is not just passive. Jesus is not passive. Nor should we be passive. Ask, seek, knock. Ask for His love, ask for His joy, ask for His fruit. Pray to be fruit-bearing. For this you were created and saved and for this you are being sanctified. Pray for it.

John Stott was a famous pastor and writer from England and a fruitful follower of Christ. Every morning as he woke up he prayed a simple prayer:

“Heavenly Father, I pray I may live this day in your presence and please you more and more.

Lord Jesus, I pray this day I may take up my cross and follow you.

Holy Spirit, I pray this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Implications and application.

Your life matters. Your life matters to God and to the world He has created and put you in.

You don't know the true value of your story; but God knows, and God himself will make sure your story is told. And when you feel like saying, "Lord, my life was a disaster," He will say "I am using your seemingly little life. Your life is essential to my plan for history. You matter. You may have no idea right now, and you didn't need to know, all you need to know and do is to love me, obey me, follow me day by day" (Ray Ortland).

That you exist means you matter to God. Don't waste your life, don't waste God's purpose, God's plan for you.

Prayer: We commit to your grace these servants, whom you have set apart for service. Make all of them salt and light in this community and grant this week be a week of seeing your glory, and fruit from their labors.

Grant them favor where they serve. Protect them from accident and injury, from evil and the evil one. Strengthen and encourage them for the task. Empower and embolden their witness. Give them unity in their service and may all know they are Christians because of their love.

Holy Father, may this be a season of fruitfulness in our hearts and in our church. Saturate our souls with the Spirit of Christ and enlarge our capacity to receive the full measure of your Spirit and your love. Give us the fullness of Christ that overflows in great love for you and in great love for each other and in great fruitfulness for your glory. Bless them beyond what they could ask or imagine. Bless them with a great blessing and bless them greatly to be a great blessing.