

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:25)

If you have a driver's license, someone taught you how to drive. Not all who have a license have taught someone but if you have one, someone taught you. I bring this up because our 15-year-old recently obtained his learner's permit. Just like my dad who taught me, I am teaching him how to drive. We got into an interesting conversation about it and what the future holds. He's 15 so let's say in 15 years from now he's married and has a child. That means in 30 years from now, he have the opportunity to teach his child how to drive. I asked him if cars will be self-driving by then. He said probably not. There undoubtedly will be self-driving cars in three decades from now; and perhaps dedicated self-driving-car lanes; but not all cars will be self-driven, therefore, someone's going to have to teach his kid to drive. Using the same hypothetical and carrying it one more generation out, let's say his kid gets married and has a kid when he/she is 30. Will his child teach his grandchild to drive? Probably not. In 75 years from now, teaching someone to drive will probably be non-existent or not needed. That makes this sermon, about the fruit of the Spirit more timely.

When I was in High School, I took a driver's ed class as a part of the HS curriculum. It sounds strange nowadays but that's how we did it. The class cost \$40. I had a small lawn-mowing company so I knew just how many lawns I had to mow to equal \$40 – it was a sacrifice but important. Our teacher, Mr. Stevens, wore a visible cross. On days when he wore a tie, he'd have a cross as a tie tack. (I went to a public school in the very secular State of Washington) One day I told dad that I appreciated the fact that Mr. Stevens was a believer. Dad looked at me and said, "Yeah, it makes sense based on what he does for a living." I asked what Dad meant by that. He chuckled and said, "Day in and day out he's teaching driving to a bunch of easily distracted, forgetful, and at times, aggressive teenagers. He's got to believe in something." Dad also mentioned that our teacher was patient, kind and generous with his time. It seems to me that it's better to express those Christian virtues than to wear a visible cross. Mr. Stevens did both.

St. Paul wrote to the church he planted in Galatia about the fruit of the Spirit. He did so because they were wandering away from their core belief and starting to become legalistic in their theology and thus rigid in who they'd let in and who they'd keep out. Writing about sowing to the flesh, he said those who are legalistic and hold others to the standards of man's law (not God's law) are holding back the church and God's transforming love. Instead, those who sow to the Spirit bear fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

You'll notice he mentioned nine attributes, starting with love and ending with self-control. Upon a closer read, you'll see fruit of the Spirit is singular (it's not fruits of the Spirit or fruits of the spirits). Yes, those nine things are one thing – fruit of the Spirit. On Trinity Sunday, I talked about three faces of God being One God. We now have nine things that is one fruit. There is some good news in this. In particular, if you struggle with one, or more of those attributes, and do others better, that's okay because it's all one fruit.

Think of it this way, there are nine virtues listed which seem overwhelming. But, if you break it down into three groups of three, it helps. I think personally that's what Paul was aiming for. We have three wheels with three spokes for each wheel. The first wheel is love, joy and peace. If you have love you feel joy, with joy comes peace. If you feel peace, you are more likely to feel joy. If you feel joy, you are more likely to love. If you feel love you are more likely to share joy, by sharing joy, people feel peace. When you feel peace, you are more likely to focus on love. It goes around and around and around like a wheel.

The second wheel is patience, kindness, generosity. The third wheel is faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Those with faith are more likely to be gentle with themselves and others. Being faithful and gentle gives you a greater sense of self-control.

Let's take a longer look at the second wheel: patience-kindness-generosity. Those who practice patience tend to be kinder to themselves and others. Those who are kind tend to be generous. A kind person is generous in letting others be who they are and not judging or condemning them. They give of themselves, especially their time. The good news is that if patience is not your strong suit, that's okay, because it's coupled with kindness and generosity.

Of all the fruit of the Spirit, the one I get asked most about, or helping someone to foster inside themselves is patience. We are not a patient culture or country. We want stuff now and we want it all. How often do you hear the phrase 24/7. Yep, we want it now, often, and all of it. But, Paul would probably say living that life is sowing to the flesh and not to the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is patience, kindness and generosity. When someone asks me to help them become more patient, I suggest they work on kindness. The basics of kindness is choosing to do something that helps yourself or others, motivated by putting someone else's needs front and center, that does not expect something in return. To be kind, say "please" and "thank you". Hold a door for someone. Pick up a piece of trash that others ignore. Buy a box of cookies and give them away.

If you look closely at these, you'll see that being kind also involves generosity. Bending down to pick up a discarded paper at Publix so that someone doesn't slip on it, and then finding a trash can (not easy to do, by the way, they keep their trash cans hidden), is being generous with your time and energy. If you walk around the grocery store to find a garbage can, you will suddenly find yourself practicing patience. If you want to be more patient, try being more kind. Go out of your way to pay someone a complement. Write a note to the person who taught you how to drive. By being extra kind, you will find yourself being more generous with your time and your love. When you are more generous, you will find yourself being more patient. It's a wheel that keeps rolling.

You may have noticed that I included "yourself" in the description of someone to be kind to. Let me ask you a question, how patient are you with yourself? Do you want to be more patient with yourself (and, I'd suggest that as we age that you become more patient with yourself)? If so, be more kind to yourself. Go out of your way to pay yourself a compliment. Treat yourself. Be extra generous with yourself (like when you get up and walk into a room and then forget why you were there – try laughing about it and then give yourself a compliment). When you do these

things you will find yourself being more patient with yourself. If you are more patient with yourself, you are more likely to be patient with others.

The fruit (singular) of the Spirit is good news. You don't have to be good at all nine because it's all wrapped into one fruit. If you are really good at self-control, that will flow into your faith, which will flow into kindness and putting others first, which will flow into love, joy and peace. If you have very little self-control, but you are gentle, you are already rolling toward a stronger life of faith and then of more self-control.

Jesus was the only one ever to be able to live into all nine. He is patient and kind and generous with us as we struggle with various spokes of each wheel. But, as we attempt to sow to the Spirit, it is guaranteed to grow the fruit of the Spirit.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.