

By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. – Matt. 7:16-20

As we continue our look at the Fruit of the Spirit and specifically today the fruit of Goodness, this passage immediately came to mind. It is a great metaphor Jesus uses in His Sermon on the Mount to teach about distinctions between false prophets and real ones. But it can also teach us about ourselves.

A fellow I knew a long time ago came to the church I was attending and was immediately a star. He began humbly enough, taking on lots of small jobs, specifically the ones nobody else wanted. He became a favorite among the older crowd and soon had all of their ears. He became close friends with a particular member and they joined the deacons together. Soon this friend of his was chair of the Deacon board, and suggested this man for Church Chair. He ran unopposed and was unanimously voted in. Soon, however, people began to get suspicious of the Senior Pastor, questioning his every move and motive, and eventually the pressure was too great. The pastor left. This man was appointed as both chair of the search committee and Interim pastor. The search was slow and got bogged down in many details. For a year, there was virtually no movement.

What was noticeable was that while this fellow was beloved by so many, and by far the most popular person in the church, everywhere he went, people became suspicious, uneasy, and negative. Eventually, a new pastor came in on the condition that this fellow leave, and so he moved on. Later it came to light that this was the 12th church he had done this to. Thank God this new pastor saw not the beauty of the tree but the badness of the fruit, and so made a right judgement.

Often in this world, we judge by outward appearances, by smooth talk, and by other's opinions. The cliché that in high school every vote is a popularity contest holds surprisingly true in adult life as well. But God calls us again and again not to look at the cover, but the contents of the book. 1 Sam. 16:7b says, "People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." This is true for kings like David, and for everyone else.

So as you look at leaders in your life, what fruit do you see born from their presence and work? When they are around, are people better, or just better off? Do they bring spiritual fruit with them, like joy or love or peace, or do they bring suspicion, sorrow, or fear? The nicest people in the world (see [yesterday's blog about being nice](#)) can still bring bad fruit. And, God says, this is how we should judge.

And judge we must. It is this world, not God, who says we should not be discerning about others. In fact, while it is not our place to condemn anyone, we have to be discerning about those we follow, quote, or learn from. We need to judge their fruit, the attitudes and effects of their life and leadership, to determine whether they are "good" or "bad".

Questions to ponder:

Ask people around you what kind of fruit you are bearing. Which of the Fruit of the Spirit shows up when you're around?

Who are you following, whether in the news, in the government, in the church, or in culture? What kind of fruit are they bearing? Did you have to stretch to come up with that answer?

How can you become more discerning of the fruit others bear? Or of the fruit you are bearing today?