

Rediscover Jesus

Part 14: Good and Bad Fruit| Luke 6:43-45

Pastor Eric Yee

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm one of the pastors at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 14 of our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus," where we're studying the Gospel account of Luke from chapters 4-9, which record Jesus' public ministry in the area of Galilee.

So let's get right into today's sermon: "Good and Bad Fruit."

Sermon Introduction

To begin, let me show you two trees side-by-side—one is an apple tree and one is a pear tree. And I want you to see if you can distinguish which is which.

<Show peach-apple-trees-far.jpeg>



Ok, raise your hand if you think the *left* tree is the apple tree.

Now raise your hand if you think the *right* tree is the apple tree.

Well, let's zoom in to get a better look.

<Show peach-apple-trees-close.jpeg>



As we zoom up close, it turns out the *left* tree is the peach tree and the *right* tree is the apple tree.

Even though these trees look very similar from afar, as we get closer to examine the *fruit*, we can begin to distinguish the two trees. The fruit doesn't lie about what kind of tree it is.¹

But this is not only true of *trees*, but this is also true of *disciples* of Christ.

We should be able to *recognize* disciples of Christ by their *fruit* because true disciples of Jesus Christ *will* bear good fruit.

The One Thing

Bear good fruit by addressing your heart with the gospel.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Luke 6:43-45.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

We are in the middle of Luke chapter 6. Jesus has just appointed his twelve apostles and he is now delivering a sermon to a great crowd of his disciples in what is commonly called the "Sermon on the Plain" (Luke 6:20-49). So far in this sermon, Jesus has described a great reversal of what it means to be blessed (vv. 20-26), how his disciples are to be marked by a love for their enemies (vv. 27-36), and how we will be judgmental towards others if we are blind to ourselves (vv. 37-42).

And that's where we are in today's passage as Jesus continues his "Sermon on the Plain."

Scripture Reading

So let's read Luke 6:43-45.

⁴³ "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

This is God's Word.

Overview

We'll look at this passage in two parts:

- I. Warning of Hypocrisy (vv. 43-44)
- II. Addressing the Heart (v. 45)

... where the bulk of the practical application will come out more in the second part.

I. Warning of Hypocrisy (vv. 43-44)

Verses 43-44 say this:

¹ Illustration taken from Aaron Menikoff, *Character Matters* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2020), 9. Pictures taken from Madison Moulton, "Peach Trees vs. Apple Trees: Which Should You Plant?" All About Gardening, May 9, 2022, <https://www.allaboutgardening.com/peach-trees-vs-apple-trees>.

⁴³ “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush.

We should first note that this passage is a *continuation* of a sermon that Jesus is giving to his disciples, where the last thing he said was, “You *hypocrite*, *first* take the log out of your own eye, and *then* you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother’s eye” (v. 42).

And here, verse 43 begins with the preposition “for,” which connects this entire passage to what he just said, so Jesus is dealing with the issue of *hypocrisy* among his disciples.

The word “hypocrite” (*hypokrites*) literally means “actor,” so to be a hypocrite is to *pretend* to be something before *others* that we *know* we are *not* before *God*.²

And as we saw last week, we can be “unintentional hypocrites” where, whether intentional or not, we can pretend—or *present* ourselves—*not* to be sinners before others when we *know* that we *are* before God.

So here, Jesus is *warning* his disciples of calling themselves “his disciples” while being hypocrites—whether intentional or not. And he gives them a litmus test to examine themselves to determine whether they *really* are his disciples. He tells them to examine the *fruit* of their lives.

<pause>

So what is the “fruit” that Jesus is talking about? It’s all the desires, thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions that he’s been talking about all throughout his “Sermon on the Plain.”

“Good fruit” is loving your enemies, doing good to those who hate you, blessing those who curse you, praying for those who abuse you. It’s being merciful, even as your Father is merciful. It’s having a forgiving and generous disposition towards others.

“Bad fruit” is hating your enemies, doing evil to those who hate you, cursing those who curse you, slandering those who abuse you. It’s having a judgmental, unforgiving, and stingy disposition towards others.

Now to say that “no good tree bears bad fruit” is not an *absolute* statement, but a *general* statement. In our present time, a *good* tree is still *not* a *perfect* tree; even among a good crop of apples, you’ll still find a few rotten or misshapen apples.

So the focus is *generally* on the crop of fruit *as a whole*, not *absolutely* on every *individual* fruit. In the same way, the focus is *generally* on a Christian’s life *as a whole*, not *absolutely* on every *individual* desire, thought, attitude, word, or action.³

So you can recognize a Christian when their life *as a whole* is *progressively* marked by “good fruit”—the kind of fruit that resembles the heart and character of Christ and the kind of fruit that aligns with the gospel we have received and believed.

That doesn’t mean that there won’t be struggles or even failures in producing good fruit at times; there will be some rotten and misshapen apples among the crop, but *as a whole*, a Christian ultimately *can* and *will* produce good fruit more and more as they follow Christ and as he “fully trains” us to be *like* him.

<pause>

Now Jesus’s concern here is that there may be hypocrites among those who call themselves his disciples, where they *say* they follow Jesus, but their consistent *fruit* reveals otherwise. They *call* themselves his disciples, but they are *not* actually his disciples.

² H. B. Charles, Jr., “Trapped By Tradition” (sermon, Shiloh Church of Jacksonville, October 22, 2019), <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/trapped-by-tradition/id973263701?i=1000454490319>.

³ R. T. France, *Luke*, TTCS (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 118.

Again, a pear tree *might* look like an apple tree from afar, but as you get up close and take a bite of its fruit, you'll soon realize that it's *not* an apple.

So Jesus is telling his disciples to examine their fruit: "What does it look like? What does it taste like? Is it bitter or sweet? Does it resemble my heart and character? Is it consistent with the gospel that you have received and believed?"

But this wasn't just for the disciples who heard Jesus' "Sermon on the Plain," but this is for all of us here who call ourselves Christians.

Jesus is calling *us* to examine the fruit of our lives and ask ourselves some hard questions: "Am I *really* a disciple of Christ? When I look at the whole of my life, am I becoming progressively more loving, merciful, forgiving, and generous like Christ, or am I static or regressing in my resemblance of Christ—and I'm totally ok with that? When I look at the fruit of my life, do I have greater or lesser assurance that I'm really someone who follows Christ as my Teacher, Lord, and Savior?"

In fact, you could say that this *whole* sermon that Jesus has been preaching to his disciples is focused on self-examination, where Jesus is essentially asking us over and over again in different ways, "Are you *really* my disciple?"

Just think for a moment: *Why* does Jesus constantly ask us to examine our lives to see if we are truly following him?

It's because he loves us, and he wants to *lovingly warn* those who are living in hypocrisy and possibly a *false* sense of assurance, and he wants to *lovingly encourage* those who are faithfully following him by faith with *greater* assurance of salvation.

As we examine the fruit of our lives, it gives us either *greater* or *lesser* assurance that we are really disciples of Christ or not, depending on if our fruit conforms more and more to the heart and character of Christ.

That's why we always announce that we're observing the Lord's Supper one week in advance—it's a regular call to self-examination.

When we announced the Lord's Supper last week, we said: "In preparation for renewing our covenant together in the Lord's Supper, let's take some time this week to examine our lives and our relationships: Are we being faithful to the covenant that we've made with the Lord through our baptism and with one another through our membership covenant? And in areas that we fall short, let's make use of this week to consciously confess and forsake our sin through repentance (Prov. 28:13) and to consciously pursue and cling to Christ through faith."

And right before we take of the Lord's Supper together later in response to the preaching of God's Word, we'll again call us to self-examination in light of the gospel we have believed and the covenant we have made.

The fact that Christ calls us to regularly observe the Lord's Supper together as a church is a loving means of grace. In the Lord's Supper, Christ again calls us to examine the fruit of our lives and to call us to repent of our sins, believe in the gospel, and follow Christ wholeheartedly as his disciple in the fellowship of his church.

<pause>

To be clear, good *fruit* or good *works* do *not* make a Christian, but *faith* in Christ makes a Christian, and when one is *rooted* in Christ, that person *will* progressively produce with greater consistency and abundance the same fruit that Christ produces.

But even as we hear this—that we should focus on whether our *roots* are in Christ and his gospel or not—many of us will be prone to wrongfully focus on our *fruits* and trying to change them in some other way.

Now let's say that you have an apple tree outside your house, but every year, the entire crop of apples is completely rotten and inedible. So each year, you hope to pick ripe, delicious apples, but every year, you get more and more frustrated as it's the same crop of rotten, inedible apples.

So one day, you get an idea. You grab a ladder, some branch cutters, a hammer, a bag of nails... and three bushels of red, delicious apples. You very carefully cut off all those rotten, inedible apples, and you symmetrically nail three bushels of red, delicious apples on your tree.

Problem solved, right?

Not at all, because what's going to happen to all those apples? They're going to rot, and next year, you should expect the same rotten, inedible apples that you've gotten every year before.

Something is fundamentally wrong with *the tree*, even to its roots and life-source, and if you don't deal with *that*, then nailing apples to your tree will never actually solve your fruit problem.⁴

<pause>

Now this whole apple nailing endeavor may sound completely ridiculous. But most of what we do to try to change the fruit of our lives is nothing more than apple nailing.

We know that Christians are *supposed* to produce the fruits of loving our enemies, doing good to those who hate us, blessing those who curse us, praying for those who abuse you, being merciful, forgiving, giving generously, and so on.

And so, we try very hard in our own strength to do all those things. We essentially endeavor to nail three bushels of apples to our tree. But it doesn't work. Something is fundamentally wrong with *us*. We're simply not loving enough, not good enough, not merciful enough, not generous enough in our own strength. We may be able to tack on good fruit for a season, but they'll eventually rot because we haven't addressed the problem of our roots and life-source; and in the next season, we'll get all the rotten, inedible fruits that we produced before.

No, if you want to change your *fruit*, you cannot focus on the fruit. If you want good fruit, make sure that you are *rooted* in Christ and his gospel. *He* is the life-source for bearing good fruit. That's why Jesus says to his disciples in...

John 15:5 = 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.

Apart from Jesus, we cannot bear good fruit. *Jesus* is the life-giving sap that our roots need to dig deep into and to soak up in order to bear much good fruit.

<pause>

Now you may be wondering: "Well, isn't it enough to just believe in Jesus? I'm saved by grace through faith in Christ alone, right?"

And to that, I would say, "Yes, we are absolutely saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. But a faith that saves never remains alone. And that's Jesus' whole point. He's not telling us to examine ourselves to see if we bear fruit that matches our confession of faith because good fruit is just a nice *add-on* to saving faith. No, he's saying that if our faith does *not* bear fruit, then it should be very alarming to us whether we have a saving faith *at all*."

Listen to the warning that John the Baptist gave to crowds that came out to him in...

⁴ Illustration adapted from Paul Tripp, "The Biggest Problem" in *What Did You Expect?*, video (Philadelphia: Paul Tripp Ministries, 2014). See also Paul Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 63.

Luke 3:8-9 = Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

We ought *not* to be deceived into think that we're disciples of Christ if we do *not* "bear fruits in keeping with repentance." We ought *not* to say to ourselves, "I was born and raised a Christian" or "I put my faith in Christ years ago," but we ought to ask ourselves, "What fruits am I *currently* bearing? Is it in accord with the gospel that I believe?"

And we should heed God's warning for us: "Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Again, to be clear, I repeat that good *fruit* or good *works* do *not* make a Christian, but *faith* in Christ makes a Christian, and when one is *rooted* in Christ, that person *will* progressively produce with greater consistency and abundance the same fruit that Christ produces.

Therefore, the tree that is cut down and thrown into the fire has *shown* through his consistent *fruits* that his *roots* are *not* in Christ and his gospel, and so, he is not truly a disciple of Christ and he still stands condemned as a sinner before a holy God.

But for all those who *are rooted* in Christ through faith, then on the cross, *Jesus* was cut down and condemned in our place, so that *we* may have life; *he* took the punishment we deserved for our sins, so that *we* would *never* be cut down and condemned before a holy God.

Rather, we're forgiven our sins and accounted righteous in God's sight, and as we continue to *root* ourselves deeply in Christ through faith, he *enlivens* and *enables* us to bear good fruit by the Holy Spirit—for the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

If you're *not* a believer in Jesus Christ, or if, as you examine the fruit of your life, you're realizing that you have little assurance to believe that you're truly a follower of Christ, then I urge you to repent of your sins and turn to Christ in faith.

Pray something like, "God, forgive me for trying to produce fruit in my own strength as a spiritually dead tree. I know that I deserve to be cut down and condemned for my sins against you. But thank you for Jesus, who was cut down and condemned in my place and who was resurrected three days later, so that I may have new spiritual life in him. Help me to stop trying to hypocritically nail good fruit to my life that never lasts, but help me to sink my roots deep into the life-giving source of Christ and his gospel, that I may bear much fruit, for apart from him, I can do nothing. I love you, Lord. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."

Again, let's sink our roots deep in Christ and his gospel, for that's the only way we will be able to "bear fruits in keeping with repentance" (cf. Jer. 17:7-8).

<pause>

So first, warning of hypocrisy; and second, ...

II. Addressing the Heart (v. 45)

Verse 45 says this:

⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

This is a continuation of the tree and fruit picture, but it's now more explicit:

- the good tree is the good person,
- the good roots (so to speak) are the good treasure of his heart,

- and the good fruit are the good works produced.

And special attention is given now to our *speech*.

So let's unpack this a bit more.

First, we need to understand what the "heart" is. This is *crucial* to understanding everything Jesus is saying here.

Paul Tripp, author of *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, writes this:

The Bible uses "heart" to describe the inner person. Scripture divides the human being into two parts, the inner and outer being. The outer person is your physical self; the inner person is your spiritual self (Eph. 3:16). The synonym the Bible most often uses for the inner being is the heart. It encompasses all the other terms and functions used to describe the inner person (spirit, soul, mind, emotions, will, etc.). These other terms do not describe something different from the heart. Rather, they are aspects of it, parts or functions of the inner person.

The heart is the "real" you. It is the essential core of who you are.⁵

In other words, "the heart is the causal core of your personhood."⁶ It is the essence of who you are and the reason behind your every desire, thought, attitude, word, and action (cf. Matt. 15:19; Mark 7:21).

For example, two people could be sitting in the same traffic jam.

- One person is pounding on the dashboard in anger and frustration, and he's muttering curse words under his breath.
- But the other person is singing along to his favorite tunes on Spotify, not bothered at all by the traffic, but thankful to have a bit more time of solitude in the car before arriving at work.

Now how is it that two people can be in the exact *same* situation and yet have two totally *different* responses?

The traffic doesn't *cause* the two people to respond in a certain way, but their two reactions are caused by what the two people have brought to the traffic in their *hearts*.

In the context of the traffic jam:

- the first person has something in his heart that produces the fruit of anger and cursing,
- and the second person has something in his heart that produces the fruit of thankfulness and singing.

They're in the exact *same* situation, but they bring very *different* hearts into that situation. The reason we don't interpret life the same way is because of our *hearts*.⁷

This is *not* to say that there aren't other *contributing factors* to how you respond to a situation; there are many.

- How well you're eating, exercising, and sleeping are all contributing factors.
- Your emotional and mental well-being is a contributing factor.
- Your job situation, your relationships with others, your home life, and all the situations, challenges, and expectations you're confronted with on a daily basis are all contributing factors.

But at the end of the day, those contributing factors are *just that*—contributing factors. How you respond still comes out of your own *heart*.

⁵ Paul Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 59.

⁶ Paul Tripp, "Grace Gives Us a New Way to Live," Crossway, January 02, 2021, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/grace-gives-us-a-new-way-to-live/>.

⁷ Illustration adapted from Paul Tripp, "The Biggest Problem" in *What Did You Expect?*, video (Philadelphia: Paul Tripp Ministries, 2014). See also Paul Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 78.

Jesus does *not* say, “for out of the abundance of *his tiredness* his mouth speaks,” or “for out of the abundance of *his busyness at work* his mouth speaks.”

No, he says, “for out of the abundance of *the heart* his mouth speaks.”

That means that you can never say to someone, “You *made* me do or say this or that.” Nobody ever *makes* you do or say anything. They may suggest, tempt, and pressure, but out of the abundance of *your heart*, you do and say this or that.

Everything else may be contributing factors that influenced you, but *your heart*—the “real” you—is what caused you to do and say those things.

If you’ve ever watched or listened to a drunk person, you’re *not* watching or listening to a *different* person. It’s the *same* sober person you know, except the filters between their heart and the things they do and say have been dampened. Drunkenness doesn’t *make* a person do or say anything; it only allows what was *already* in their hearts to come out unfiltered.

So first, the heart is the causal core of your personhood; it’s the “real” you that is behind your every desire, thought, attitude, word, and action.

[⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.]

And second, we need to understand that what the heart treasures and stores up is what influences what comes out of the heart.

In other words, your output will match your input. If you input the things of this world, don’t be surprised when your speech and actions resemble the world more than Christ. But if you input Christ, his gospel, his promises, and the eternal glory that awaits us, then your speech and actions will resemble Christ more than the world.

That’s why Scripture calls us to “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col. 3:2) and to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:20-21).

So what is your heart treasuring and storing up?

- Are you treasuring Christ and his gospel? Or are you treasuring sin and the false promises of this world?
- Are you storing up the eternal things of heaven in your heart? Or are you storing up the temporal things of earth in your heart?

Whatever it is that you’re treasuring and storing up in your heart, it will eventually show in your speech and actions.

What conversation topic do you find yourself repeatedly getting to, no matter how the conversation started? What do you think about when you first wake up or when you lay down at night? What would your closest friends say that you care about most?

And if you don’t like what your speech and actions reveal, rather than trying to change your speech and actions in your own strength (which is just apple nailing), focus on changing what you treasure and store up in your heart. In other words, don’t focus on your *output*, but focus on your *input*.

If you want to treasure Christ and his gospel more, then...

- pray for God to show you the emptiness of your current treasures and to show you true satisfaction in him,
- start a daily Bible reading plan,
- show up consistently to Sunday Celebration to hear God’s Word preached and to engage with God’s people,

- remember the covenant you entered through baptism every time you take of the Lord’s Supper,
- go to LIFE Group to discuss and apply God’s Word into your life,
- pursue discipling relationships of care, commitment, and challenge,
- join prayer gatherings,
- listen to worship songs,
- read good Christian books,
- fast from social media and streaming services to make room for all the above.

To be clear, these are *not* hoops to jump through—that if you do all these things, then you will somehow be guaranteed a certain output. No, you cannot guarantee that any more than you can guarantee good health with a balanced diet and regular exercise; you can eat well and exercise regularly and still end up getting sick.

But *generally*, what you put *in* determines what will come *out*. So we would be wise to focus on having the kinds of *inputs* that will feed and influence our hearts to treasure and store up Christ, his Word, his gospel, and the eternal things of heaven.

<pause>

So first, the heart is the causal core of your personhood; second, your output will match your input; and...

Third, we need to understand that if we want to see different *fruit*, if we want to see lasting life-change, we must address our *hearts*.

I know that this probably sounds very similar to what I just said, but it’s slightly different—and it makes a world of difference to understand the distinction.

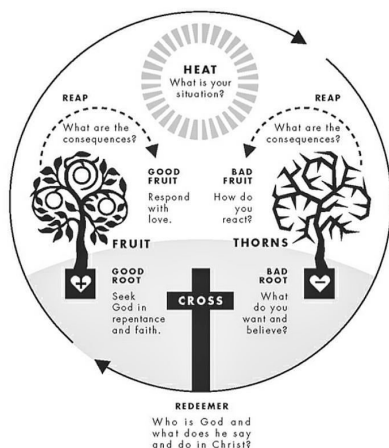
What I just mentioned about inputs ensures that you’re *surrounded* in a Christ-centered, gospel-revealing context that you can soak in. But just having those inputs doesn’t automatically *apply* them to your heart.

For example, you can be at a feast of the richest and most sumptuous food, and you can still starve. That might seem unthinkable, but it’s possible. How can that be? Because being *surrounded* by food is not the same thing as *eating* the food.

In the same way, you can be surrounded by everything you need to feed and influence your heart towards Christ, and yet you can still starve spiritually. How can that be? Because being *surrounded* by the gospel is not the same thing as *applying* the gospel to your heart.

Now let me share one framework that has been so helpful for me in applying the gospel to my heart in my everyday life. It’s taken from a book called *How People Change* by Paul Tripp & Timothy Lane, but it’s a direct application of this passage here in Luke 6:43-45.

<Show howpeoplechange.jpeg>



- [1. **Heat.** This is the person's situation in daily life, with difficulties, blessings, and temptations.
 2. **Thorns.** This is the person's ungodly response to the situation. It includes behavior, the heart driving the behavior, and the consequences that result.
 3. **Cross.** This focuses on the presence of God in his redemptive glory and love. Through Christ, he brings comfort, cleansing, and the power to change.
 4. **Fruit.** This is the person's new godly response to the situation resulting from God's power at work in the heart. It includes behavior, the heart renewed by grace, and the harvest of consequences that follow.⁸]

The framework has four main parts: heat, thorns, cross, and fruit—each with corresponding questions.

First, there's *heat*. This is the person's situation in daily life, with difficulties, blessings, and temptations.

Personally, I feel like I have a lot of work to do with a limited timeframe these days. I have a seminary course due in less than two weeks, but I still have a lot of reading, discussion questions, two exams, and a research paper to do. But I'm also preaching each week, leading our church through polity changes, and have other family and pastoral responsibilities.

<pause>

Second, there's *thorns*. This is the person's ungodly response to the situation. It includes behavior, the heart driving the behavior, and the consequences that result.

So in my current situation, I feel anxious and stressed. I feel rushed in my time in the Word and prayer because I need to hurry to get my workday started in order to get everything done. I feel myself getting more irritable with interruptions and with the ruckus that my kids are making around me while I'm trying to work. I end up judging how my day went by how much I got done, but I find myself not being satisfied with each day because I didn't get enough done.

And as I realize how I haven't been pleasant to be around for my wife and kids, I feel terrible, and so I apologize to them and I resolve to not respond that way again, but then I feel my anxiety and stress compound again as deadlines approach.

Now when I come to my senses and can think about what's going on in my heart, I find that it's that same idol I've always struggled with coming out again. My deep idol is that I need to see myself as good and capable in whatever role that I have—as a husband, a father, a pastor, a student, a courteous human being, and so forth.

So right now, I feel as if that idol is threatened. I don't think I'll be able to finish all my work well when everything is due, and so I feel very vulnerable because I have a tendency to put my identity in my performance because I *have* to see myself as good and capable in whatever role that I have. I'm anticipating my failure and I'm getting anxious and stressed.

On top of that, along the way, when I'm trying to focus on work and seminary, and I find myself irritable to be around with my family, I feel like I'm failing as a husband and father. And so, it adds to my anxiety and stress. My whole conception of who I am is being threatened and so I react in negative ways internally and externally, and it has negative affect on everyone.

<pause>

Third, there's the *cross*. This focuses on the presence of God in his redemptive glory and love. Through Christ, he brings comfort, cleansing, and the power to change.

⁸ Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008), 97, Kindle.

Now this part of the cross is key in this entire framework. Without this, the gospel never gets applied to your heart. We have to be able to convict ourselves with the *joy* that we have in the gospel.⁹

Blaming unideal environmental factors will *not* be enough to bring about change, but this is probably one of the default response of most of us. For example, I could say, “Well, if only I could go out and work at a café, or if only I didn’t have to send my kids to school, or if only I didn’t have to eat lunch with my family, *then* I would have more time to get my work done.”

Good luck trying to control a million different environmental factors to have the ideal situation where you’ll respond differently; it won’t work but you’ll become a controlling person where others will feel like they need to walk on eggshells around you in order to not disrupt the ideal situation you absolutely need to be a pleasant person.

This doesn’t apply the gospel to your heart, but this avoids your heart by focusing on external circumstances.

Also, avoidance of sin and its consequences alone will *not* be enough to bring about lasting life-change. For example, if I just say to myself, “I really need to stop raising my voice at my kids. I need to do better. I need to stop doing that. If I keep doing that, when they grow up, they’ll remember how unpleasant it was to be around me and they won’t want to spend time with me and won’t enjoy talking to me.”

As true as that statement is, recognizing the consequences for our sin only temporarily deals with it, but it won’t last because the focus is still entirely on *myself*—“I want to have a good relationship with my kids, so that I can see that I’m a good and capable dad, and that my kids will affirm that when they’re older.”

This doesn’t apply the gospel to your heart, but this ironically digs your roots deeper into the idols of your heart, expecting that it’s going to produce a different fruit, but it won’t—not for long.

Rather, if we want to apply the gospel to our hearts, we have to be able to connect the joys of the gospel with the particular sin patterns that we see in our hearts. That’s the only way that you’ll get lasting life-change.

So when I realize that it’s my deep idol of needing to see myself as good and capable in whatever role that I have, I remind myself of the gospel and *apply* it to *that* particular sin pattern in my heart.

So throughout this busy season, my prayers have sounds like this: “God, forgive me for trying to find my identity and worth in being good and capable rather than in Christ. The gospel shows me that I am *not* good and capable, but I am a sinner who can never ever be good enough, but you are the only one who is perfectly good and capable, and my security is now found in you. Thank you that I don’t need to prove my worth or fear of losing your approval, but in Christ, you always accept me and affirm me. And I trust that you are a faithful God, so help me to trust you, to do my best, and to be worshipful as I go about my day—not working for my identity and worth but rather working out of my secure identity and value already found in Christ. I love you, Lord. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.”

<pause>

Fourth, there’s *fruit*. This is the person’s new godly response to the situation resulting from God’s power at work in the heart. It includes behavior, the heart renewed by grace, and the harvest of consequences that follow.

If I was secure in my identity and worth in Christ, then in those interruptions and amidst the ruckus around me, I wouldn’t respond with irritability, but I could just breathe, calmly ask my kids to quiet down, and continue faithfully working without a crushing weight of feeling like my identity and worth are on the line. Amidst the time crunch of much to do, I wouldn’t be overrun by anxiety, stress, and irritability, but I would simply do my best to be faithful, ask for help from those who can help, and be reminded of how God is sovereign, faithful, and good—and how I can trust him. I would not be working

⁹ Tim Keller, “How to Change Deeply” (keynote, New Canaan Society Weekend Retreat, Washington D. C., May 1-3, 2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQgxuDI8DXs>.

for my identity or to prove my worth, but I would be working *from* my secure identity in Christ and as an *expression* of worship to him who alone has proved himself worthy.

<pause>

So that's the *How People Change* framework, which is a direct application of Luke 6:43-45.

This framework has been immensely helpful to me over the years. Whenever I go through conflict with someone, whenever I feel down or frustrated about something, whenever I feel overwhelmed by a situation, I go through this framework of heat, thorns, cross, and fruit.

But let me just say that it's not easy and it's not quick. Addressing our hearts with the gospel is a lifelong process, but it does bring about lasting life-change where we *will* bear more good fruit as disciples of Christ.

In the past, my deep idol of needing to see myself as good and capable in whatever role that I had would completely paralyze me. I would be on my knees in tears, crying out to God in prayer, trying to apply the gospel to my heart, and I would feel a sense of peace and security in my identity in him. But as soon as I would get up from my knees, the same overwhelm of anxiety and insecurity would come upon me again, and I'd be right back to my knees again, trying to apply the gospel to my heart.

It got to the point where I didn't want to get out of bed, I would feel physically nauseous when I needed to do things that I didn't think I was particular good at, and I couldn't get myself to do simple things because I felt so overwhelmed.

I'm not saying that I don't struggle with wanting to see myself as good and capable, and all the anxiety and stress that comes along with it anymore; I do.

But by God's grace, as the gospel has been applied to my heart over and over again, they have not overtaken me like they have in the past. You can ask my wife to confirm, but I'm honestly not the same person I was years ago.

<pause>

When we learn to do this, when we learn to address our hearts with the gospel of Jesus Christ over and over again, it begins to totally transform us from the inside out.

The *only* way to change the fruit of our lives so that we ultimately *can* and *will* consistently and abundantly bear good fruit is to address our hearts with the gospel.

Jesus has not come to cut off a branch here and a branch there, but to completely uproot us and replant us with roots running deep in himself and his gospel. He has come to remove our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh; he has come to give us a new heart and to put a new spirit within us (Ezek. 36:26). Nothing else will do.¹⁰ Nothing else will produce the good fruit that only *he* can produce in us by his Spirit.

If we want to bear good fruit, we must address our hearts with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

<pause>

Now let's get into the...

Life Application

1. Examine the fruit of your life and ask yourself, "Am I really a disciple of Christ?"

¹⁰ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity (C.S. Lewis Signature Classics)* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 196-198, Kindle.

Jesus went to great lengths to lovingly warn his disciples of hypocrisy and to teach them to ask themselves this question as they examined the fruit of their lives. So we should heed his warning and be willing to examine our desires, thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions and see if it gives us greater or lesser assurance that we're really rooted in Christ and his gospel.

2. Repent of sin patterns in your heart and convict yourself with the joy that you have in the gospel.

As you examine the fruit of your life, look for sin patterns in your heart—like constantly reacting from a deep desire for control, comfort, success, approval, security, or competence. And then make it a habit to address those particular sin patterns with the joy that you have in Christ and his gospel.

The *How People Change* framework is a great personal tool to help you with that, but it's not a quick fix by any means. It's a lifelong process of addressing our hearts with the gospel and a progressive work of bearing good fruit that God does in us.

3. Seek out discipling relationships to intentionally help one another understand and apply the gospel in your lives.

Part of a healthy discipling relationship should be sharing openly about sin struggles and patterns. It should include asking good questions to help each other better *understand* why we do and say the things that we do, and even more, helping each other *apply* the gospel to the particular sin struggles in our lives.

If you don't already have these kinds of relationships in the church, please seek them out with trusted brothers or sisters. If you need help, please talk to one of your LG leaders and I'm sure they can help get you connected into these kinds of discipling relationships in our church.

The One Thing

Bear good fruit by addressing your heart with the gospel.

Conclusion

Can we all stand as we respond to God's Word together?