

“By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”  
-Galatians 5:22-23

### On Teaching Paul

I love teaching the letters of Paul. True, the good saint has his detractors.... I tell my kids, I have come to terms with those counsels with which I disagree. Not all of the Apostle’s words must speak to me - after all, Paul was writing to people in different times and in different communities. Similarly, if all of my young students were to go to sleep-away camp, I might write them each very different letters suggesting ways to make the most of the camp experience. To the shy one, I might suggest trying to speak to one new person daily. To the boisterous one, I might offer a recommendation to find time for contemplation. To the nervous one, I might reassure them of my love as well as suggest the potential affection they might find in new friendships.

So it is with Paul. His letters often address specific situations. Some of his advice is beautifully applicable to our present day and personal reality. Sometimes, we find new and unexpected gems in passages that we’ve read many times.

### Fruits of the Spirit

Paul’s lists of the fruits of the spirit are well-known and beloved. One such list appears in Galatians: “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (5:22-23). When teaching about the fruits of the spirit, I start by asking my kids about fruit. I ask them to think of words that describe fruit in general, rather than specific kinds of fruit.

Typically they respond with adjectives such as:  
Refreshing ... Sweet ... Ripe ... Fresh ... Yummy ... Juicy

I remind my kids that fruit has been called “nature’s candy.” So why, I ask, them did Paul use the term “fruit” to describe these desirable characteristics? **Why not “Vegetables of the Spirit”?** Even if you love the green stuff, that phrase just doesn’t have the same appeal!

Recently, in posing this question, a young child looked at me quizzically and said, “You

know, fruits have seeds. The seeds can grow to produce more good fruit.” Boom. Mic drop. Once again the brilliant intuitive grasp of a child’s theology took my breath away.

### **Seeds of Faith**

Fruit does have seeds. And if I gave each child a seed to plant, whether it germinated, grew and produced fruit would depend on how it was treated. A seed watered and given sufficient sunlight would blossom; a seed neglected, unwatered, or left in the dark would remain dormant.

The fruits of the spirits are like seeds planted by God in our hearts. We can nurture them, surrounding ourselves by the people and situations who will cause the seeds to flourish; or we can stunt their growth, leaving them dormant. But these traits - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are always there - waiting to be nurtured.

### **Youth Group Activities for this Lesson**

There are many ways to encourage your children to think about and nurture the fruits of their spirit. Here are just a few ideas:

**Make fruit salad!** Use 9 different kinds of fruits and talk about which might represent each fruit of the spirit. Of course there is no right answer, but the kids will come up with really interesting theories!

**A physical reminder.** Create some other memory device to remember each fruit - a different colored bead or piece of yarn to make a bracelet; or different fruit-shaped ornaments.

**Act it out.** For older kids, have them make up a skit or charade to illustrate how each spiritual gift might be expressed, then have the rest of the class guess which one they are acting out.

**Social media.** For social media savvy teens and tweens, have them create a visual meme (an image with a word or phrase) for each fruit of the spirit. They can then post these on Instagram or Twitter (don’t forget there are lots of fruit emojis!). Ask them as a group to come up with useful hashtags.

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*Lisa Brown recently accepted a position as the Director of Digital Ministry with Membership Vision. Building on her work in Children's Ministry and Communications at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh, PA, she helps churches connect to people and to God in the digital space. An active member of Forma and Girl Scout leader, Lisa is passionate about enriching the spiritual lives of people. Her book "The Best Do-It-Yourself VBS Workbook Ever" will be published in early 2017.*

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