

Love, A Fruit of the Spirit
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As a youth growing up in rural Vermont in the 50's and 60's, I spent much of my free time on my grandparents' dairy farm with my siblings, cousins and neighborhood friends. They had a fruit orchard, a huge garden, a herd of cows, many pigs, chickens, ducks, and horses. In the spring of the year, they would boil sap and make maple syrup, maple butter, and maple spread. From the time I was old enough to remember, we never visited the farm but what we left with the "seasonal fruits" of their labor: eggs, milk, cream, butter, vegetables, fruit, homemade jams and jellies, maple syrup and maple fudge, sweet and sour pickles, homemade bread and donuts, beef, poultry, or pork. And let's not forget raspberry, blackberry, blueberry picking, and nuts from the old butternut tree. It was better than a trip to the supermarket because everything was nutritious, healthy, raised or made on the farm, and wrapped in love. It was natural and biological fruit, which we praised God, my grandparents, and family for at every meal.

My grandparents and most adults attended church on Sundays, and the kids attended Sunday school. There we learned about another type of fruit, the "fruit of the spirit." According to the Bible, the nine attributes of a godly life are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In Galatians 5: 22-23 the attributes are known as the "Fruit of the Spirit." The Holy Spirit works to develop these attributes in people who have accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. We are constantly digging in the nine fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV). These attributes are the mark of Jesus and result from walking with the Holy Spirit. When these sentiments are present in the lives of believers, one's life and heart should develop patience, become more loving and peaceful, and reflect the life of Jesus.

When looking at these Christian attributes, the first one that Jesus himself calls us to is "love." Love for God and others is not only evidence of Christ's presence in one's life, but it also holds the power to transform a person's existence. As the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 12:9-10 (NIV), "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in Love. Honor one another above yourselves." Fundamentally, love changes a person's life by instilling a sense of purpose, forgiveness, and compassion, and it motivates them to live a selfless life focused on serving others, reflecting the love they have received from God. Essentially, experiencing God's love leads to a desire to extend that same love to others, creating a ripple effect of positive change in their interactions with the world. I have since realized that the ripple effect of Jesus' love for positive change is what my grandparents were embracing and teaching.

My grandparents raised four sons and two daughters, and their 33 grandchildren much of the time. The four seasons consisted of visits to the farm, and when we were old enough, we all helped with the farm chores, even wood cutting and haying. In winter, we

gathered the sap for the syrup in galvanized and wooden buckets. We worked hard and played hard when chores were done. Some of our pleasures were swimming, horseback riding, hopscotch and jump rope, hide and seek, playing marbles, spending time in the sand box with Tonka toys, swinging from a tree with a rope and tire, and hours spent sliding, skiing, and building snow forts.

My grandparents' Love was unconditional and selfless. It encapsulated care for others, not just the family's well-being. They reached out to the neediest in the community, much like the focus of the Community Church of Huntington (CCH). Love was an emotion that people expressed freely and openly for one another—and the Almighty. It is one that God speaks back to his creation.

One of the things I enjoy the most about worshiping at CCH is the spiritual fruit of Love. It reminds me of the big family farm I grew up on where my grandparents cultivated love. On Sundays CCH is more than just a group of people gathering to worship. One of our missions at CCH is focused on reaching the least served and the neediest in our community. We will come alongside and gently help with a problem or struggle, provide appropriate assistance, and help them carry their load. (*Galatians 6:2*) *NIV*, "Bear one another's burdens and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."

We continue to bring our community needs before God with expectation and stubborn, relentless Prayer, much like my grandparents did on the farm and in the community. CCH provides support through activities such as: Neighbor Helping Neighbor, monthly community engagement in the form of community service, community dinners, Pastoral Spiritual Counseling, Senior Luncheons, Weekly Prayer Ministry, Food Pantry, Church Picnic, raising funds, discipleship, volunteering, collaborating, and other small church sustainable mission projects. We reach out to those who suffer losses from severe storms and flooding to support various needs. Life at CCH has many similarities to growing up on the family farm.

Community and global outreach are essential to CCH life, embodying the call to love and serve our neighbors. We do it because we believe that real change happens when you have a growing heart for God, heart for each other, and heart for our community as part of our world. This also helps build lasting relationships that create growth, understanding, and mutual support, much as my grandparents endeavored to do on the farm and in their community. At CCH, we believe when we walk the path of Christianity with the Spirit, we begin to bear the mark of Jesus through the Spirit of love, joy, peace, forbearance (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, all representing the fruit of the Spirit.

Although the family farm has since been sold, and my grandparents are deceased, its influence continues through multiple generations, much like the ongoing impact of CCH. By the church working together, just as we all did on the family farm, we will forever be changed by the Love of Jesus.

If you would like to learn more about CCH and the church's outreach footprint, we invite you to attend worship at 9:00 a.m. on Sundays in person or watch the CCH worship service live streaming on Sunday mornings at 9:00 a.m.

on [facebook.com/CommunityChurchofHuntingtonVT](https://www.facebook.com/CommunityChurchofHuntingtonVT). Recordings of past weekly worship services are available on the CCH Facebook page. You may contact Pastor Fred Little, Jr. at any time at 802-777-8840.

changed by the Love of Jesus. We're more than a Sunday gathering. We believe that Prayer:

"Dear God, we come before you with hearts full of gratitude and Love for the opportunity to serve others. We pray for wisdom to discern the needs of those around us and the courage to act with loving kindness and generosity. Please guide our actions, strengthen our resolve, and let our service reflect your Love and compassion. May our service be a testament to your grace, and may we always find joy in giving back to you through our actions, Lord. Help us to support and love one another, strengthening our bonds through Your grace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."