# Introduction

## A few years ago I went to the doctor because of a pain in my hip. I feared the worst. Having been a runner for 30 years, and having a dad who’d had a hip replaced, I thought, “here we go. I’m going to need a new hip” I started with my primary care doc. He pushed and poked and said, “my guess is, calcific tendentious. Got get some x-rays and take them to this orthopedic surgeon.” I did – and my appointment with that doc lasted all of about 20 seconds. He waltzed into the room with my x-rays. He put them on the screen. Looked for 2 seconds, turned to me and said, “you do not have calcific tendentious,” and started to walk out the room. I jumped off the table and said, “Wait. Well what do I have? It hurts.” And he walked over and said, “Let me guess. It hurts right here.” And he poked me on the hip. And I crumbled. “Yes! That really hurt.” He rolled his eyes and said, “that’s not your hip. That’s you IT band. Stretch. S T R E T C H, and away he raced.” It was all very condescending. But as I stood there thinking about what had just happened I realized. Good news! I do not need a new hip. No surgery. He took one look at the xray and was able to know exactly what was going on. A look on the inside was all it took.

## Hold that thought. We’re coming back to it. A look on the inside helps us know what is really going on.

# Review

## We have studying the sermon Jesus is most famous for – looking at a number of the radical ideas and ideals he introduced in it. Ideas designed to build a new community – to usher in his kingdom

## Last week we looked at our need to judge ourselves first. We noted that we have to judge people and ideas. We have to be discerning. The only way to have a good life is to make good decisions. Indeed, we are called to judge. But – we are to judge ourselves first, and do so with more honesty and clarity than we typically bring. This requires that:

### We embrace the Gospel. We understand that in Christ we are safe. God knows the worst about us and loves us in spite of it.

### We assume the log is in our own eye and find ways to see it. We have to privilege voices other than the one playing inside our head in order to get the truth.

### We need to treat others the way we want others – and God! – to treat us.

## What follows today goes in a new direction. Having just encouraged you to lean into God’s grace, I’m now going to push you to action.[[1]](#footnote-1) And all of this unfolds around the metaphor of fruit.

### The Bible refers to fruit quite a bit. In the Psalms we are told that we “eat the fruit of the labor of our hands.”[[2]](#footnote-2) It is not saying we are farmers and eat what we grow, but that in life “we reap what we sow.” In Galatians, Paul will suggest that the “fruit” of our broken nature is adultery, idolatry, hatred, jealousy and all manner of trouble, whereas the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,gentleness and self-control.[[3]](#footnote-3) In other passages fruit is used to refer to prosperity, in yet others to spiritual and biological children, to our attitudes and actions and to our praises of God.[[4]](#footnote-4)

### And it’s not just fruit that is talked about. It’s also fruit trees. At one point in Matthew, Jesus curses a fruit tree for failing to produce fruit. In another he says that if a fruit tree fails to yield fruit it should be cut down and used for fire wood.

### Bob Buford, one of the men I look to for counsel, set up a foundation called 100X – because those are the returns he wants to see in his life. Not in terms of money – he already did that. But in terms of what matters to God. And he often talks about what that is in the context of fruit – which he defines using Peter Drucker’s definition of changed lives.

#### Bob met with Peter Drucker a couple times a year for several decades, is now the President of the Peter Drucker Foundation and leans heavily into Drucker’s many insights. And Drucker says this when talking about fruit and the church: “nonprofits do something very different from either business or government. Business supplies either goods or services. Government controls. The nonprofit institution neither supplies services nor controls. Its product is neither a pair of shoes nor an effective regulation. Its product is a changed human being.”

#### Buford, who is in his 70s and working with hundreds of ministries through his Leadership Network Foundation and working with hundreds of people through HalfTime, says “the fruit of my life now grows on other people’s trees.”

### I share that to say, once you start paying attention you’ll see *fruit* used as an important spiritual metaphor in all kinds of settings.

### And here is where we go back to the X-ray – because that is one of the ways the term is used. There is a sense in which fruit shows us what is going on on the inside. It’s a visible expression of an inward nature. If you are growing apples you are an apple tree. If you are growing poison berries, you’re not an apple tree, you are a poison berry bush. You might say you are an apple tree. You might think you’re an apple tree. But no one is making a pie out of what grows on your branches.

### In this same way, our thoughts, words, actions and accomplishments are the fruit of our life and a window into the state of our heart.[[5]](#footnote-5) We may or may not like what we see.

## OK, two cautions before we jump in. This passage is designed to force you to look at your life and, done right it will leave most of us a bit humbled. The words of Jesus often do that. They are frequently unsettling. Some of what He says brings comfort - to the humble and broken. Some of what he says brings peace. But some of what he says leaves us reeling. I never want to soften that. It’s not my job to get between you and Jesus. It’s not my job to soften what he says, just make sure what he says is clear. But I do want to shape how you hear this just a bit.

### Let me encourage you to be careful about comparing yourself with others. It doesn’t work well. To stick with our fruit analogy – it’s apples and oranges. We’re not supposed to. God does not. It’s a fatally flawed exercise – it’s selectively done from a distance. We can feel better or worse about ourselves based on who we decide to compare ourselves to and what we decide to focus on. We do not all have the same gifts. And we do not all start in the same place. Many of us were born on third base. We should not confuse that with hitting a triple.

### Secondly, let me encourage you to be careful about validating your life through your children. One of the biggest ways parents (especially some Moms) assess their lives is through their children. At some levels that’s understandable and appropriate, but at other levels it’s not and it can fuel some real trouble. Perhaps all I really need to say here is, parents do not control all of the variables. My thinking here is shaped by an interview I read last week with Kay Warren about the suicide of her son, Matthew. Kay and Rick Warren – Rick is the pastor at Saddleback and the author of *The Purpose Driven Life* – Rick and Kay’s youngest son took his life just over a year ago. The story of what they did to help their son, who had mental health issues from early on, and what they have been through is heartbreaking. The last 18 months were a nightmare. They had done and were doing everything they could – but we do not control other people. We cannot and should not. We shape our children, but we do not control them or all of the variables.

## I am hoping that Christ’s words will lead you to ask some hard questions about your life – your heart and the fruit you are producing. I want to caution you about comparing with others or, if you have children, putting too much there.

# OK, enough said. Let’s jump in. Let me read our passage: Luke 6:43-45

## “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briers. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

# Four Ideas here.

## Bad news first: Bad fruit = Heart Disease, and we’ve all produced some bad fruit. We’ve all grown some misshapen, rotten, bug-riddled fruit. That’s a sign that we have problems on the inside.

### Bad fruit is an indication that we have some bad in us. And we have all given evidence that this is true.

### A big debate rages over who we are and it plays out over many different fields and disciplines. It’s sometimes framed as the nature versus nurture question. And some who jump in, for instance, the Behavior Modification advocates - B.F. Skinner and his disciples – argue that we are just a stimulus response machine. Our actions are nothing more than biochemical responses to what is going on. So, if you do not like the response, change the input. We are simply a morally neutral black box. We are not bad, we are products of our environment.

### Others enter the debate behind Jean-Jacques Rosseau, the 18th century Genevan philosopher who gave us the phrase *tabula rasa* – the idea that children were a blank slate. This sounds like Skinner, but Rosseau argued that we are essentially good – that in nature, in the wild, we are noble. Left on our own we are wonderful. Our problem is we are corrupted by society. It may not surprise you to learn that although Rosseau fathered a number of children, he did not stick around to raise any of them. Had he, he might have realized that you do not have to teach a two year old to be selfish, say no or throw a tantrum.

### In contrast to both of these theories – and hundreds more – Jesus says the bad we see on display is a manifestation of a bad heart. There is no disagreement that our environment can help or hurt us. Our friends can lift us up or pull us down. The things we read and watch can push us forward or drag us back. But in a culture that was obsessed with food laws because it was so concerned with what we put into ourselves, Jesus said, “it’s not what goes in that matters.” And in a culture that had all kinds of regulations about what you could and couldn’t touch and remain pure, Jesus said, “that’s not it either.” It’s not what is on the outside that matters. The problem is our heart.[[6]](#footnote-6) Our hearts are broken, corrupted, deceitful, fallen, depraved, sinful.

### I camp here all the time. I keep making this point – we are broken. I am sinful. You are sinful. I know it gets old. I know I sound like little Johnny One Note. But I highlight this for two reasons. First, we hear the opposite all the time. Everyone is good. Everyone is wonderful. As I said last week, we live in Lake Wobegon, were “all the women are strong. All the men are good looking and all the children are above average.” Today everyone wins a trophy! And everyone – even the person who just killed four people – is good. (Have you noticed that? Ever watched someone interviewed on TV – the son or brother or neighbor of someone who has just killed four people. What do they say? “He’s a good person. He was so nice.” This person has just broken into a house and killed four people and the person is saying, “they are good.” So, the first reason I keep returning to this idea that our hearts are broken is because we do not hear that we have a serious heart problem very often.

### The second reason I go here is because we need an accurate diagnosis before we can focus on a cure. If we are going to get better, we have to understand what the problem is. Men and women, the Good News is only Good News if you understand the bad news first. If your problem is society, well good luck fixing that. If your principle problem is your parent’s fault, or your boss, or the other people who messed up your life, then I don’t really have anything to say to you. But if you will step up and own your broken heart, then I have Good News. Christ died for that! Confess your sin, embrace Christ and follow Him.

## Number Two: Our lives matter.

### The second point is easy to miss. It’s not stated, but it is implied. And it’s important: You matter. Your life matters. Everything about you matters.

### One of the take-a-ways of what Jesus is teaching here is that because we have been made in the image of God, and entrusted with many gifts and abilities, and because we are going to live forever, everything we think do and say matters. The choices we make matter. Everything about us matters.

### Some worldviews make us feel small. Some religions talk about a future in which we eventually cease to be. As we will see, part of what Jesus teaches is that we will live forever, and everything we do now will matter forever. It’s a mind-numbing idea.

## Number Three: We are expected to do good things and become better people.

### This passage is not complicated but it is profound. The implications here are staggering. You are expected to bear good fruit. You are expected to bring grace and hope and joy where you go. You are expected to make things better for everyone else. If you know Christ, you are an agent of the Kingdom of God and you have an assignment. And that includes doing good and getting better.

### About half of the parables that Jesus teaches celebrate grace. They focus on God’s wonderful love. He meets us where we are. We do not earn his favor, we accept it. He’s the hero. Half of the parables are like the Parable of the Prodigal Son. We mess up. Ruin everything and crawl back home. And when we do we find a loving, gracious God who welcomes us back with full privileges as his child. Half the parables lean in that direction. But the other half tell us to get in the game and do everything we can with what we’ve been given. Half of the parables are like the Parable of the Talents, which says whether you were given one talent, three or five, you’d better be about turning it into more. We are to leverage our talent, money, time, everything for God. They all belong to God. They are on loan to us. We are expected to live in such a way that He is pleased. We are expected to do good things and become better people.

## Number Four: A lack of good fruit is a sign that something is wrong.

### Bad fruit or no fruit is like the idiot light going on on the dashboard of your car. It tells you, there is a problem. Things are not working the way they should.

### Bad fruit is like an MRI that says, “in places you can’t see things are not good. You’d better do something.” Healthy fruit trees produce good fruit.

### In the margin let me say two things here. First, please remember, time alone does not change things. We do not get better over time unless we are doing the right things. We just get older. We do not get wiser just because we are older. There are plenty of old fools out there. Some people remain stuck. Doing the wrong thing over and over only makes it easier to keep doing the wrong thing.

### Second, in the ways that matter most, you can be a better person tomorrow. I don’t care who you are. There are stages of life. Power and influence tends to come to us in our 50s and 60s and then slip away. Some get it earlier. Some hold on to it longer. But for most of us, our professional peak is in our 50s and 60s and then we fade. Likewise, we enjoy our best health in our 20s, and then it begins to fade. We decline. We can fight it. We can mask it. But – one man’s example – we can keep trying to get better but we will not. I’ve been running four or five times a week for 30 years. In some disciplines I’d be getting better every day. Not as a runner. I’m not getting faster. I’m declining.

### That is the way it all works in a broken world. But! But, in the ways that matter most we can keep getting better. We can keep growing as a person, becoming more of who God wants us to be. We can continue to love and serve others, shape others in helpful ways. When I was in high school I learned, the best fruit comes off the oldest trees. Or, we can steal a line from Bob Buford, and look for our fruit to grow on other people’s trees.

### The point is, good fruit is expected. And the lack of it is a cause for alarm.

# So, how does a fruit tree produce good fruit?

## Can we carry this metaphor further? Trees make it look effortless. They are never in a panic. How do they do it? Well, there are a few obvious things they do that we can think about. Being healthy pivots on a few things:

### They need to be planted someplace where they can survive.

### They need to put their roots down deep.

### They need sunshine and rain. And fruit trees need bees to pollinate them.

### In John 15 Jesus expands the metaphor. He says that He is the vine and we are the branches, and if we abide in Him we will bear much fruit.

## There are a few things to think about there: are you well planted, getting sunshine, are you abiding. But I want to end with a different one. The truth is, the best fruit trees are pruned every year.

### Story about first house. Neighbor worked up in the mountains, first as logger then in stream restoration. We had this gnarly tree in our front yard and he said, “I think it’s an apple tree, but I have never seen any apples on it.”

#### First you cut the shoots

#### Then you cut things that overlap

#### Then you work on shaping the tree

#### You can’t cut more than 30% at a time.

### You prune a tree to direct it. You are saying no to lots of things that are not going to bear fruit.

### Some of you need to be pruned.

# Conclusion:

## What kind of tree are you?

## What kind of fruit are you bearing?

## Do you need to be pruned?

## Are you abiding in Christ?

## Fruit trees that do not produce fruit are about to become firewood.

## Good trees should produce good fruit.

1. Do not be confused. Celebrating God’s grace does not mean we do not work as hard as we can to be better. Acknowledging that we do not earn or contribute to our salvation is not the same thing as saying what we do doesn’t matter. It does. As we will see, we need – we are expected – to do good. We need to give more than we take. We need to leave things better than we find them. We need to put the needs of others ahead of our own. The point is, we do not do this so God will love us, but because He does. Out of thankfulness for what God has done and will do, we live lives that look more and more like they are supposed to. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Psalm 128:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Galatians 5:19-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Psalm 1 & Prov. 8:1-20; Deut. 28:4 & Rom. 1:13; Heb. 13:15 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Bible uses the term *heart* to refer to the “seat, sum, center” of who we are. It is not referring to a biological organ, but to the essence of who we are. Life comes out of the heart, words come out of the heart, motives and deeds come out of the heart. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Matthew 15:17-1 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)