



Growing a Life
That Matters

fruitful living

Elisa Morgan

“Elisa gently explores the work of God in growing good fruit in our lives, the fruit of the Spirit. Filled with relatable examples and practical exercises, *Fruitful Living* will bring encouragement and help as you collaborate with God’s Spirit to bear fruit.”

—**Amy Boucher Pye**, author of
Transforming Love: How Friendship with Jesus Changes Us

“As my friend Elisa Morgan reminds on the following pages, *Fruitful Living* isn’t about perfectly executing a to-do list. It’s about ruthlessly attaching to a person—Jesus. And what He started in you He will finish. You can count on it.”

—**Michele Cushatt**, author of *A Faith That Will Not Fail: 10 Practices to Build Up Your Faith When Your World Is Falling Apart*

“With vulnerable authenticity, compassion, and wit, Elisa reveals the rewards and the ‘costly choice’ of being disciplined by God. Each chapter ends with an invitation to dig deeper into Scripture and Get Growing. Relevant and worthy of repeated readings as a personal devotional or a group study, *Fruitful Living* comes alongside hearts ready to receive the Gardener’s gift of a fruitful legacy.”

—**Xochitl Dixon**, contributing writer for *Our Daily Bread* and *God Hears Her*, and the author of *Waiting for God* and *Sacred Strides: Walking in the Power and Presence of the Holy Spirit*

“Refreshing. Thought-provoking. Biblical. Challenging. If you long to live a life that matters, read this book. Elisa Morgan skillfully reveals the secret to leaving a legacy that will far outlast your achievements. It’s a fresh look at the fruit of the Spirit and it will provide the tools for making a heart change that results in positive action. Read it the first time on your own; then gather

a group of friends to study, discuss, and implement a plan for personal and spiritual transformation.”

—**Carol Kent**, founder and executive director of
SpeakUp Ministries and author of *He Holds My Hand*

“Just when God’s weary workers need a fresh word, the marvelous Elisa Morgan comes forth to lead us into inspiration that enchants, excites, and delights. With her splendid new book *Fruitful Living*, she takes us into God’s fruitful garden to let the Orchard Keeper Himself plant, prune, and grow a bounty of rich spiritual fruit to render in us a life that matters. So taste and see.”

—**Patricia Raybon**, a regular contributor to
Our Daily Bread, author of *God Is Our Help*
and the award-winning *Annalee Spain Mysteries*

“This book is your guide to grow a meaningful life—one filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Elisa’s approachable and relatable stories combined with biblical truth show us how to discover and cultivate a purposeful life worth living, even in the hardest of seasons and worst of circumstances.”

—**Laura L. Smith**, author of
The Urgency of Slowing Down and *Holy Care for the Whole Self*

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INTRODUCTION

Longing for a Life That Matters

T pulled back the covers and lowered my fifteen-pound Jack Russell Terrier, Mia, to the carpet. Over ten years old now, she woke eeeeeaaarrllly each morning, insisting on a potty break. (My husband calls this “checking her pee-mail.”) Mia’s errand completed, I returned to the kitchen, where I punched a pod into the Keurig and stood looking out the window at the day while mentally reviewing my calendar.

Not much there, really. Writing. Grocery store. Walking Mia. More writing. In my current season of life, my hours are mine for scheduling. I can assign most appointments in the neat slots on my phone’s calendar, including work, friends, grandma time, and even reading and walking. Most days I’m fulfilled, even happy. Occasionally I wriggle against the sensation of boredom as it slips through the cracks into my awareness. And yet this particular morning, staring out the window while my coffee dripped in the background, I wondered about the meaning of my life. What legacy would I leave? Who would remember me and for what? (Research shows that our names are only remembered three

generations after we die.¹) Was there anything in my efforts that really was pleasing to God?

These are not new thoughts. I asked these same questions as a scared single girl exploring education and vocation options, as a newly married woman dipping my toe into coupledness, as a frantic mom dashing between kids and work and EVERYTHING, and as a mother of teens-turning-to-young-adults who suddenly seemed to want pretty much nothing from me (except in all the emergency moments when they needed me and my husband and more than what any human could offer).

One of our greatest questions in our lives focuses on our purpose. Contribution. Impact. Influence. Legacy. In short, what difference do we make? And one of our greatest answers to this question is that we want to grow a life that matters. This drive toward purpose motivates us to produce achievements. We climb the career ladder, nurture a family, add titles and letters after our names, chair committees, write books, create art, develop a social media platform. Achievements mark our contribution on this planet.

Until they don't. When we slip down a rung or two at work . . . when our family matures beyond needing us . . . when we're no longer invited to lead, our books go out of print, and social media ignores us . . . how do we measure our mattering then?

"As Henri Nouwen frequently reminds us, achievement is not the same thing as fruitfulness," writes Ron Rolheiser. "Our achievements are things we have accomplished. Our fruitfulness is the positive, long-term effect these achievements have on others. . . . When we die, while we may well be eulogized for our achievements, we will be loved and remembered more for the goodness of our hearts."²

Here's where the fruit of the Spirit comes in. If we want to describe a life that matters, one with purpose and meaning and

contribution, we'll turn to the evidence of these characteristics that God offers us in Scripture.

Look at the words. Just the words.

Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control.

When we focus on those words—just the words—that compose the classic fruit in Galatians 5, we pause. Something stirs inside us. Loving? Yes, please—I want to be. Patient? Absolutely. They're attractive qualities. We want them. We want them in us, and we want to reproduce them in others. We long for them in our days and our nights and in all the moments in between. And long term, in moments when we look out at the length of our lives, we yearn for the legacy of a fruitful life that memorializes these characteristics as our life's central offering. Oh, that others would speak of us with these beautiful adjectives and, in so doing, see Jesus in us!

But how? Here's where it gets challenging, right? After all, we're not Mother Teresa or Jesus. We're us. Humans. On the run. In the trenches. Under stress. Many of us are moms and grandmoms. Some of us are wives. Daughters and granddaughters making our way. How can we grow such qualities in ourselves or in those we love? Growing a fruitful life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control seems beyond our grasp.

That's because we hold two misunderstandings about the fruit of the Spirit. We think spiritual fruit is about being nice. Plus, we think it's all up to us to produce. Neither is true.

The fruit of the Spirit is not about being nice. The fruit of the Spirit is about being like Jesus. Jesus was *always* loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled. But these qualities didn't always wear the peeling of "nice" in His interactions. His love was acted out in telling a prostitute to stop

sinning and religious leaders to quit making faith harder than God intended it to be. His kindness led Him to touch an outcast leper during a day when such an action was strictly prohibited. His peace put Him to sleep in a boat with disciples in the middle of a storm out at sea. Such moments don't define "niceness." But they were definitely fruit filled.

It's not about being nice. But the *being* part is true. Rather than a list to perform, these godly characteristics are the result of God's work in us, transforming our inner beings into what He always intended us to be: like Him.

Neither is the fruit of the Spirit all up to us to grow. It's not our job to produce these qualities in our lives or in the lives of those around us. Fruit production is God's job. In his Discovery Series booklet *A Fresh Look at the Fruit of the Spirit*, Con Campbell puts it this way: "We must understand that these characteristics are produced by the third person of the Trinity. He is the agent, the source and the power that grows the fruit."³ The fruit of the Spirit grows when we let God live these qualities in us and through us as we grow in relationship with Him. Fruitful living results from an ongoing attachment to God while still being human.

Ready to grow a life that matters?

We'll begin with the work of grasping the definition and purpose of God's fruit—in general. Then we'll move on to understand each individual fruit both biblically and practically. For each spiritual fruit, I've assigned a literal fruit as a metaphor to help us remember its essence. Finally, we'll focus on how we can attach ourselves to God as the Source of fruitful living in order to grow a life that matters. Each chapter also includes a "Get Growing" section to help apply concepts personally in everyday life—or for use in a study with friends.

Throughout the book, I'll be including comments and insights from you—readers who responded to a survey done through social

media. Over the years, I've learned that books are better when I include more viewpoints and insights.

Fruitful living is about growing a life that matters by peeling past the “niceness” of Christianity and getting down to the honest truth of letting God grow us to become more like Jesus. God makes it simple. We make it hard. As much as we want to grow a life that matters, He longs to grow such a life in us. So let's get growing!



PART 1

Fruit Matters



CHAPTER 1

What Is Spiritual Fruit?

You're in the produce section of your neighborhood grocery store. Just for a minute, lay your list aside and look. In bins and boxes, piled high, stacked neatly, arranged in alternating bands of color, are fruits of every imaginable flavor and type. Focus on the fruit.

Apples mirror your reflection in their polished surface. Within their crunchy fruit, their seeds make a star-shaped design when cut in half horizontally. Grapefruit exude a tangy, sweet aroma, their skin thick and spongy. Bananas perch delicately, bunched by fives and sixes, yellow skin dotted with brown age spots. Strawberries wear their seeds like a sweater. Pineapples guard their sweetness with a prickly exterior. Coconuts challenge any fruit eater to break through their shell to the good stuff.

Fruit. Varieties of smells and shapes and sizes. All nutritious. All sweet. Each distinct. Each unique.

Fruit is the result of growth. It's the evidence that a plant or a vine or a tree has been cared for to the point of reproducing. Spiritual fruit is what results in our lives when we root ourselves in a relationship with God. When we live a life connected like this with God, He grows His nature in who we are, and fruit

results. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Consider the opposite for a moment. The New Testament book of Galatians lists certain qualities resulting from a life disconnected from God. The writer, a follower of God named Paul, lists “sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these” (Galatians 5:19–21 *ESV*). Not too pretty! Not produce we’d pinch, smell, and take home to The Fam for the week. They are obvious, says Paul (v. 19), and his list isn’t even complete, just illustrative (v. 21). These characteristics result from a life lived on our own, separate from God and stuck with only the best we can be.

Ah, but then Paul describes the results of a life lived in connection with God. A life lived in a healthy direction that makes a difference today for tomorrow. A fruitful life. The fruit, the produce, of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (vv. 22–23 *ESV*). Here are attractive, appealing attributes we want in our lives, the lives of our children and grandchildren, and the lives of those in our world.

However, the fruit of the Spirit aren’t like a checklist of items we pick up at the grocery store. They’re not something we’re commanded to bear. Rather, they are qualities others observe in us when we’re in relationship with God—and not all believers will bear all the fruit all the time. At times, some of us will be more patient, more peaceful, or more loving than others. Moreover, in addition to Paul’s list of fruit in Galatians, other God-grown characteristics are mentioned elsewhere in Scripture—qualities like perseverance, humility, and thankfulness that display the Spirit’s work in our lives.¹

The fruit of the Spirit are those godlike qualities that make us look like Him. Rather than *doing* words, they are *being* words. They describe His nature exhibited in our personalities. When we plant ourselves in a relationship with Jesus, day in and day out, He produces His characteristics in us. The fruit of the Spirit is what we look like when we're like Jesus.

Such a description can be unsettling. Looking and acting like Jesus? That might be a very good thing—but will our own personality fade away? Will God replace the “me” we know with some saint-like replica of what we believe Jesus to be? Will our edgy enthusiasm be tamed to a controlled warmth? Our tough determinism melted to a driven discipline? We picture a robot-like being—only holier. We pull back and wonder, Will I even recognize myself if I live such a fruit-filled life? Will I still be me?

Remember, the fruit of the Spirit is not about being nice. The fruit is God's characteristics. But His characteristics are exhibited in our unique personalities. Being like Jesus means showing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in exactly who we are—not something other than ourselves but fully and authentically ourselves.

Peace in your own skin might look like a calm version of a caffeine addict, whereas in the skin of your friend it may look more like a way laid-back chill. Joy might appear as stillness in you but more like a whooped-up party in your sister.

For me, this “God's fruit in my own skin” concept comes home when I look at my major life heroes—and how far short of their image I feel I fall. Take Mother Teresa. Compassionate. Giving. Fearless. Sacrificial. Content with possessing nothing. I look at the life she lived, immersing herself in the power of Jesus amidst poverty and offering hope without ceasing. Then I think about my own attitude when I get stuck forty-five minutes in traffic, or when my husband doesn't move his snack plates from the sink to the dishwasher.

Mother Elisa looks very little like Mother Teresa.

But hey, we're so hard on ourselves! Yes, there are way too many moments when "ugly" emerges in my life responses. But there are actually occasions when I find myself engaged by a friend's need to the point that I race to the hospital to be at her side and don't seem to notice I haven't eaten or had anything to drink or even gone to the bathroom for hours. Or I notice someone's favorite shirt is soiled and so I throw in an extra load to prepare it for the next day's needs. Or I notice I'm extra grumpy *before* I lose my tongue and don't actually verbalize what I so much want to say.

Maybe I don't look like Mother Teresa all the time. But maybe—just maybe—I look a little bit like Jesus now and then because I'm rooted in a relationship with Him and He's growing me to be like Him.

Wait a minute—I'm saying that it's harder for me to look like Mother Teresa than it is to look like Jesus! Well, of course. It's always harder for us to repeat the offering of another person than it is to be the best we can be with the help of Jesus.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are the fruit of the Spirit. These are God's qualities exhibited in our personalities. These are what we look like when we look like God.

Get Growing

1. Read Galatians 5:13–25. Paul contrasts the acts of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. How do they differ? Where do you struggle with the "acts of the flesh"? Now consider Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit. Which most appeal to you?

2. Think about how peaches grow from a peach tree, strawberries from a vine, pineapples from a bush. Each fruit looks unique and yet grows as a result of its attachment to the source of growth. Mentally flip through the people you know who model spiritual fruit. Maybe your mother-in-law, your sister, a neighbor, a coworker, or a pastor. Name the fruit you can see most plainly in each person's life. How does each fruit change from personality to personality? What does this exercise tell you about what spiritual fruit might look like in your personality? How about in your children, your grandchildren, your spouse, or your dearest friend? What did you learn?
3. God's character grows in you as you "plant" yourself in Him. Have you ever made such a decision to plant yourself in God? You can pray a simple prayer like this:

Dear Jesus, I want to be like You. I need the help and the promise You offer. I need the hope of being connected to You and Your perfection in this crazy world. I can't do life by myself without messing it up. Please save me from myself so I can be the best me I can be by being in a relationship with You. And, as I "plant" myself in You, will You please grow these qualities that look like You in me? I long for a life that matters and that makes a difference in my family and my world. I realize that happens when these qualities are growing in me out of a relationship with You. In Your name, Amen.



“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22–23 ESV)

The fruit of the Spirit is . . .

- The outward demonstration of the Holy Spirit working in my life. (Amy)
- The evidence of a life that has been given to Jesus and is growing in holy beauty and intimacy with Him. (Glenda)
- Not just knowing but living out love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Jessica)
- The characteristics of Jesus. (Amy)



What does it mean to live a good Christian life?

Does following Jesus mean you'll always be cheerful or nice? Does it mean you'll continually work a bit harder at self-improvement? No and no.

With biblical truth, warm storytelling, and relatable testimonies, Elisa Morgan wants to put those misunderstandings to rest. Sit down with Elisa as she

- equips and challenges you to exercise the fruit of the Spirit in your daily life;
- offers encouragement for shaping a life that truly matters through Spirit-led principles; and
- asks insightful questions for personal reflection or group study.

Peel past the outer layers of your faith and discover what can happen when you let God transform your life into something truly sweet!

ELISA MORGAN cohosts the syndicated radio program *Discover the Word* as well as the *God Hears Her* podcast, and she writes for *Our Daily Bread*. A speaker and author who communicates the truth of God's Word in captivating ways, she served 20 years as the CEO of MOPS International and has written over 25 books, including *Christmas Changes Everything* and *You Are Not Alone*. Learn more at elisamorgan.com.

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