

# fruit of the Spirit as a medic or nurse

Pippa Peppiatt explores the effect of the Holy Spirit in our lives



**W**hat qualities would you like to see in a medic or nurse caring for a close member of your family in hospital?

You may be familiar with the fruit of the Spirit, written about by Paul in Galatians (5:22 NIV 1984): *'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.'*

As medical and nursing students, we already have standards to follow in our professional codes. In 2011, the GMC conducted a survey of all its members as to what makes a good doctor.<sup>1</sup> The top answers were competence and compassion, kindness, empathy and respect - similar to the Galatians list of love, kindness and gentleness.

Virtues that nurses are supposed to exhibit, according to the RCN, include the 6 'C's of care, compassion, competence, communication, courage and commitment.<sup>2</sup>

With this similarity of virtues and fruit of the Spirit, how then, as *Christian* medics and nurses, can we make Christian virtues an integral part of our professional development and be the best doctors and nurses we can be? Most of those we work with will try to act virtuously, which may not look much different on the surface. But when we're working as medics or nurses and midwives, we aren't just working. We're engaging in an opportunity to display the fruit of the Spirit and manifest something of the character of God through our work. Ultimately this is to bring glory to God - that he be glorified, that we grow, and others come to know Christ - this is the ultimate fruitfulness for a child of God.

## what are the fruit?

It's no mistake that the first fruit mentioned is **love**, reminding us of 1 Corinthians 13 that tells



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us all we do only has meaning if it comes from a place of *love*. The English word love has very broad meaning, but the New Testament Greek word, *agape*, was very precise. This love is not a feeling, but a choice - the choice to be kind, to sacrifice, to consider another's needs greater than one's own. How we need this *agape* as we deal with demanding patients or unsympathetic seniors.

The Greek word for **joy** is *chara*, also meaning to delight, which again implies an element of choice. We choose whether to value God's presence, promises, and work in our lives. When we keep in step with his Spirit, he opens our eyes to God's grace around us and fills us with joy (Romans 15:13). By seeing our workplace, our patients and our fellow students through God's eyes, he can give us joy even in the hard places and we can truly know that 'the joy of the lord is our strength' (Nehemiah 8:10).

The fruit of **peace** is the peace of a harmonious relationship with God. Isaiah 26:3 says 'You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast because they trust in you'. God's peace transcends earthly matters - so it *is* possible as Christian medics and nurses not to be frazzled, crazy people tossed about by the urgencies and the stresses of the day. Our peace ultimately comes through the Spirit, not our ability to organise ourselves or perform. What a relief!

The word for **patience** is *makrothumia*, literally meaning 'long temper', as in 'the ability to hold one's temper for a long time'. It is the fruit I most struggle with, especially when I'm tired or in need of food. The KJV translates it 'longsuffering'. A patient person can endure much pain and suffering without complaining,

and is slow to anger as he waits for God to provide comfort and punish wrongdoing. Patience allows us to endure a less than desirable situation like poor staff ratios on the ward, a difficult colleague or a bad management decision. Although some issues may need our active involvement, we can also rest in hope as patience helps us see the bigger picture. Patience leaves room for God to work in our hearts and in our relationships. We lay down our schedule and trust in God's.

The Greek word for **kindness** is *chrestotes*. It means 'tender concern'. It is kindness of heart and kindness of act. On multiple occasions, kindness induced Jesus to stop what he was doing and help others in need, even when extremely tired. To express kindness with constancy and to all people requires the work of the Spirit. It may be shown by not simply doing the minimum of work required of us, but seeking to go beyond and be excellent. Be proactive in doing good; be on the lookout to make things better for our patients, our colleagues and managers.

**Goodness** is holiness in action, the virtue that relates directly to morality. It results in a life characterised by a desire to be a blessing. The Greek word translated 'goodness', *agathosune*, is defined as 'uprightness of heart and life'. *Agathosune* is goodness for the benefit of others. This is a wonderful virtue for medics and nurses to aspire to - let's try to be a blessing in our universities and workplace!

**Faithfulness** is steadfastness, or allegiance; it is carefulness in keeping what we are entrusted with. Faithfulness is believing that God is who he says he is and continuing in that belief despite the ups and downs of life.

We trust he will work out everything for good. We trust he is in control, even in the face of illness and suffering.

**Gentleness**, also translated 'meekness', does not mean weakness. Rather, it involves humility and thankfulness toward God, and respectful, controlled behaviour toward others. This reminds me of the 'respect' and 'empathy' virtues the GMC survey highlighted as key characteristics for a good doctor. At times when we need to initiate, act, protest or be change agents for good, our actions should still be characterised by this gentleness.

When we are filled with gentleness, we will forgive readily, because any offence toward us is nothing compared to our (forgiven) offences against God.

The final fruit is **self-control**. One of the proofs of God's working in our lives is the ability to control our own thoughts, words, and actions. Believers need self-control because the outside world still entices us with the temptation of instant gratification, and there is a daily battle over our new nature versus our old sinful nature. Self-control protects us from indulging our foolish desires, and we find the freedom to live and work as we're meant to.

## the need for God's enabling power

How do we grow and live in the fruit of the Spirit? On our own, it would be impossible. It's testing enough of the godliest character to be on the wards after a week on call in a pressured NHS environment. But 'of the Spirit' explains exactly who causes the fruit to grow in us. No amount of human effort or determination can produce spiritual fruit, but the Spirit's influence in a surrendered heart can work miracles. It's the Holy Spirit's job to conform us to the image of Christ, making us more like him.

## cultivating fruit

Although given by his grace, it is also true that we have a part to play in cultivating this fruit in our lives. Trees and vines left alone will bear fruit poorly, if at all. Horticulturists have to work hard in order to get a good crop. In 2 Peter 1:5 we are told to 'make every effort' to add certain qualities to our faith so that we will not be unfruitful. Paul's passage on the fruit in Galatians is sandwiched between two exhortations; to 'live by the Spirit' (5:16) and to 'keep in step with the Spirit' (5:25).

Our job is to *keep close to Jesus*, the Vine - to keep in right relationship with him. To keep short accounts with him and with others.

*Choose* that we will love, will have joy, will have peace, will not take offence, and do everything we can to carry out those decisions.

Then *see our trials as opportunities to grow in the fruit*. For example, in order that we may learn love, he may bring into our lives patients or colleagues who are hard to love. In order to develop faith, he may place us in situations that seem hopeless, so that we have to depend on God.

Finally we must *pray*. 'If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously without finding fault, and it will be given to you' (James 1:5-8). The same principle applies to each of the aspects of the fruit of the Spirit. If we lack love, pray that God will give us love. Do the same with joy, peace, and all the other aspects.

And pray expectantly! ■

### REFS

1. [www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/10059.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/10059.asp)
2. NHS England to rollout '6Cs' nursing values to all health service staff. *Nursing Times*, 23 April 2014 [bit.ly/1KNOQuR](http://bit.ly/1KNOQuR)