

“Rooted in the Right Place and Space”

Scripture: Psalm 1: 1-3; Galatians 5 (selected verses)

Lucy Crain

May 3, 2026



I was 29 years old when Jim and I bought our first house—and I was terrified.

Looking back now, with a little more life behind me, I can see how young we really were: barely out of what now feels like childhood. Some of you may hear “29” and think, *that’s well into adulthood*. Others—with the wisdom that comes from years lived, some of whom I’ve had the privilege of visiting this week—might smile and think, *oh, you were just getting started*.

So perhaps we can meet somewhere in the middle.

Think back with me for a moment to a time when you stepped into something new that felt just a little too big for you. A moment when you thought, *I should be able to handle this... but I’m not entirely sure that I can*.

For me, it was the middle of July. It was outrageously hot, the air thick with that unmistakable Charlotte humidity. I was expecting our third child. Jim and I had moved away from family and the only home we had ever known East Tennessee to what felt like the “big city.” We had two young children, degrees, jobs, and now—a house.

We were doing it. We were “adulting,” as my grown children would say. And then something unexpected happened. Our realtor told us the previous homeowners wanted to meet with us—to go over the garden. The garden? (pondering here) I remember thinking, *well, my grandmother Ruth had roses—I can handle a garden*.

I could not handle that garden.

When she arrived, the woman who had loved that home before us began walking us through the yard with a kind of passionate devotion. She pointed to every tree, every shrub, every flower—telling us why she had chosen each one, how each one was different, how

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each required something particular, and how all of them needed careful, constant attention.

I hadn't even moved a single piece of furniture into that house. There wasn't a crib set up for the baby on the way. And yet there I stood, trying to absorb a rapid-fire list about soil conditions and watering schedules and pruning techniques. I started scribbling notes, but even as I wrote, I knew it wouldn't be enough.

I wouldn't be enough.

I suspect I am not alone in this feeling. The sense of being handed something—perhaps even something good, something beautiful—and yet along with it comes an invisible list of expectations. A quiet pressure to get everything right, to keep everything thriving, to manage it all perfectly.

Maybe it's not a garden. Maybe it's your work. Your family. Your sense of call. Maybe it's even your faith. A list of things to do. To be. To maintain. Whether that list comes from somewhere outside of you, or from deep within your own expectations, it can feel overwhelming.

So when we come to Paul's words in Galatians—the fruit of the Spirit—it's not hard to hear them that way, is it? Like a kind of sacred checklist. We've heard them before. We've even heard them sung down these hallways by our children, who can recite them with ease. **I** going to ask our amazing choir to help me remind us of them now:

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

But our children are not being taught a checklist. They are being given a gift.

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And that can be harder for us, as adults, to receive. Because somewhere along the way, many of us have learned to hear these words as expectations rather than promises. As standards to meet rather than signs of life. But Paul is not describing something we must produce through effort or discipline.

He is naming what grows in us when we are rooted in God. Because fruit is not forced.

Fruit is grown. The psalmist gives us a picture for this: a tree planted by streams of water, yielding its fruit in its season, it leaves not withering. It does not strain to bear fruit. It does not anxiously compare itself to the trees around it. It simply remains where it is planted—drawing life from a source beyond itself.

Its fruit is the natural outgrowth of that relationship. And so it is with us.

Eugenia Gamble, in *Tending the Wild Garden*, writes about the tension between our striving and our surrender. She reminds us that the life of the Spirit is not something we force into being—it is something we receive, something we allow, something that unfolds in us as we are tended by God.

Like those flowers in my yard that—somehow—still bloom, the fruit of the Spirit shows up not because we have mastered the conditions, but because God is faithful to tend what God has planted. And the fruit of the Spirit grows not in spite of who we are, but because of who we are: created in the image of God, held in a love we cannot lose, and cannot fail.

Gamble also speaks of what she calls a “defiant joy.” A joy that refuses to be diminished by circumstance. I was reminded of that this week. I reached out to a friend to help me remember a guest from our Room in the Inn ministry—Eileen. The details of her story had grown a little fuzzy for me, but Henry remembered clearly.

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He told me this:

“I heard someone tell Eileen they were sorry about her condition. She smiled, and said in her best New York accent, ‘I’ve got cancer—so what? I can and will beat this.’”

And week after week, she came back—joking, teasing, claiming life with a kind of stubborn, holy joy. She made fun of me for grabbing a brownie before dinner. She laughed easily. She carried something within her that did not deny her reality—but refused to let it have the final word.”

That is defiant joy. Not something she manufactured. Something that was alive within her. What I remembered was that over and over again, her joy didn’t stay contained. It spilled outward—lifting others, softening hard days, placing smiles on weary faces.

That is what the fruit of the Spirit does. When we are rooted in the love of God, what grows within us does not remain only for us. It becomes nourishment for a world that is, in so many ways, starving for fruit.

My friends, I am just a regular person like you—a “pastor imposter,” as we sometimes joke in my house—but I believe this with my whole heart: The Spirit can use me. And the Spirit can use you. Not because we have mastered the garden. But because we are rooted within it.

So I invite you this week to return to these texts—Psalm 1 and Galatians 5.

Sit with them. Let them work on you as they have worked on me. Let them sink beneath the surface of all the expectations you carry, all the lists you have made for yourself, all the quiet ways you may wonder if you are enough. And let the Spirit do what the Spirit does. Root you. Nourish you. Hold you steady beside living water.

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And in time—perhaps when you least expect it—you may begin to notice something growing.

Love, where there was once fear. Peace, where there was once striving. Joy—maybe even defiant joy—where there was once weariness. Not as something you achieved. But as something you were given. Something grown within you by the grace of your Creator.

And that will be more than enough to share.

Amen.