

All Fruit Looks Good



Have you ever seen an apple that looked red and perfectly shaped, so ripe for the eating, only to pick it up and have your fingers go through a mushy part in the back you couldn't see at first? Or maybe an orange that was bright and beautifully round that your mouth just watered thinking about its juiciness, only to pick it up and realize that it was actually hard and felt completely dry?

Squeezing is one of those common techniques that we often use to determine whether some things, especially fruits, are as good as they look. All fruit looks good until it gets squeezed. Squeezing is a test that helps to reveal the truth.

When I was a young believer, I really struggled with Paul's suggestion that we might rejoice in our sufferings. He encourages the Romans in chapter 5, verse 3 saying, "We can rejoice when we run into problems and trials..." James says something similar in the opening of his letter, so it seems like these guys really mean that we can rejoice...while we suffer. In James 1:2, he says, "Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy."

Rejoice when I run into problems? Consider my troubles an opportunity for great joy? From a fleshly perspective, I was completely unable to wrap my mind around the idea of how I was supposed to be happy about my problems.

As an image-bearer of Jesus Christ, my life is subject to much fruit. His love for me, and mine for him produces so much good for me, and in me. Galatians 5:22 affirms what we can clearly see: But The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But what happens when that fruit is squeezed? Just like actual fruit, it's only when a little pressure is applied that the truth about that fruit's ripeness is revealed.

What happens when my dreams of becoming a mother are shattered by infertility or miscarriage? Where do I turn when my only sibling's life is taken in an act of domestic violence? How do I respond when my son's bad decisions leave him facing a prison sentence? When I find myself down in the mire of suffering, squeezed and tested by the trials of life, does my peace evaporate? Does my love turn into hate? Does my patience turn into angst and worry? Do I lose my faithfulness? Am I just like that squishy apple or that dry orange? Am I too something that looks good on the outside, but whose goodness disappears as soon as it's squeezed?

I don't know about you, but I don't want a life that just looks peaceful. I actually want to know and to experience peace in my life, especially in the midst of grief and uncertainty. I don't want to be the kind of parent who shows grace and patience when my child breaks a dish or fails a test, but disowns or abandons them when they flunk out of college or break the law. I don't want a heart that immediately forgives a stranger for cutting me off in traffic, but harbors anger and bitterness towards my divorced parents who still can't get along. I don't want a life full of joy and blessing, but unable to rejoice because I'm so focused on the world's brokenness and injustice. I don't want to just look like I possess good fruit, or for that fruit to just manifest in the shallow and easy parts of my life. I want that fruit to penetrate me so deeply that its

existence is certain, not only when my problems are simple and everyday, but way down deep in the pit. I don't want some shallow hope that fades as soon as the nights get really long, but solid impenetrable assurance that I will one day share in God's incredible glory. I want to be doubtless that every need I possess will be filled to overflowing and that all my brokenness will be made into wholeness. And if that means that the fruit in my life needs a little squeezing, then I am ready. Let the truth be tested so that I may show that my backside isn't mushy, but patient, peaceful, kind, and gentle. Apply the pressure, so that I may be certain that my insides aren't hardened and dry, but disciplined, self-controlled, and faithful.

All fruit looks good, until it's squeezed, but only good fruit withstands the squeezing and remains good.

Paul goes on to say in Romans that problems and trials help us develop endurance, and that endurance leads our hope to grow even stronger. James makes a similar claim, emphasizing that our endurance gets a chance to grow and when it's fully developed, we will be perfect, and complete, and need nothing.

Unshakeable hope? Perfection? Wholeness? Needing for nothing?
Now those sound like some reasons to rejoice!