

Q: Think back on the past year. Which of the fruit of the Spirit would you say are more obvious in your life today than a year ago? How do you feel about that?

- Do you think any of the Spirit's fruit is less obvious in your life than a year ago? Explain your answer.

GOD'S-EYE VIEW

A thought about Galatians 5:22-23—

Jesus combined what we call masculine and feminine traits in a comfortable balance of humanness. He hugged children and spoke up for them (Mark 10:13-16), he got physical with merchants who exploited poor people in the temple (John 2:13-22), he was tough on people who were full of themselves (John 5:41-47), he cried over the grief of a friend (John 11:35). Jesus was not a stereotypical, testosterone-crazed man, and he wasn't a sissy. In a culture where children were disposable and women would have been second-class citizens if they'd been allowed to be citizens at all, Jesus respected children and treated women as equals.

And the spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, produces fruit in every believer's life—because with the fruit of the Spirit, gender has nothing to do with anything. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control—legal in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. God's Spirit nullifies “boys will be boys” and “women—can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em.” The Holy Spirit replaces roughness with gentleness and transforms compulsiveness into self-control.

In our culture women may be considered masculine and men may be thought feminine for exhibiting characteristics that are merely godly. It breaks my heart—on those days when it doesn't make me angry—that these characterizations are about as common inside the family of God as outside. We can't control what outsiders say about us, but shame on us for choosing cultural stereotypes over the whole basket of the fruit of the Spirit. That's just plain wrong.

WRITE ABOUT IT

Q: Do you ever wonder if you're as masculine (or feminine) as you're supposed to be?

Q: Who are the best models of masculinity you know?

- What makes their masculinity appealing?

Q: Who are the best models of femininity you know?

- What makes their femininity appealing?

Q: What do you think the best models of masculinity and femininity have in common with each other?

- How are they different?

Q: With whom can you talk about masculinity, femininity, and the evidence of the Spirit's presence in your life?