

# A FRUITFUL LIFE BUILT ON SOLID ROCK

*(Vivienne Stapley Memorial Service)*

I knew Vivienne as a friend, a neighbour and a co-worker for the kingdom. And this evening, I want to talk about Vivienne's solid spiritual foundations, and the spiritual fruit she produced.

Our reading from Matthew's gospel concerns Jesus familiar parable about the wise man who built his house on a rock. A man who built it on firm foundations. So when the rain came down, when the streams rose and the wind rose, the house stood firm. In contrast, the foolish man build on sand, with poor foundations. So when the rain came down, when the streams rose and the wind rose, the house fell down.

And who does Jesus say the wise man is like? The wise man is like someone who hears Jesus words, and puts them into practice. And what are Jesus words? Follow me. Learn from me. Be like me. Put your trust in me.

And this is what Vivienne did. She followed Jesus. She learned from Him. She knew her bible inside out. She understood it, and was an effective teacher and preacher of the word. And she put her trust in God. She had a firm faith in God, and a firm faith in God's provision for her. These were her firm foundations. And this firm faith in God was not shaken when the storms of life arose.

Because like all of us, there were storms in Vivienne's life. As Christians, none of us are immune. She would have preferred being married to the single life. She once said to Janet that she hadn't given up hope of meeting a retired, widowed bishop! Not entirely in jest, she was making a serious point. She suffered persistent illness, especially after moving to Spalding. And she never found a church in Spalding that was quite to her taste.

But none of the storms of life disturbed her faith, because like the wise man she had built on sound foundations.

But of course, firm foundations are not enough to build a house. They're a good start, but we still have to build the house. Vivienne built the house by the disciplines of regular worship, study and prayer. And the result of putting Jesus words into practice meant her life bore fruit. Jesus said "I chose you and appointed you that you might go and bear fruit." Paul takes up this idea our reading from the letter to the Galatians, when he lists the fruit of the Spirit.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control”. This fruit of the Spirit is a description of what Jesus is like. So producing the fruit of the Spirit means becoming more like Jesus.

And how do we produce this fruit? Well, first of all we must be open to the Holy Spirit. Not quenching or grieving the Spirit. We welcome the Spirit and allow the Spirit to fill us.

Then the second step is what Paul calls “sowing to the Spirit”. We find this later in Galatians, in 6:7-8. So producing the fruit of the Spirit is not just the work of the Holy Spirit alone. We have to “sow to the Spirit”. We have to do our best to produce the fruit of the Spirit.

We have to be loving, joyful and peaceful.

We have to be patient, kind and good

We have to be faithful, gentle and self controlled.

But the Holy Spirit gives us the power to make this happen.

It’s a partnership between us and the Spirit. As we try to be more like Jesus, the Spirit gives us the power to **be** more like Jesus. Without the Spirit, progress would be very slow and the yield of fruit would be tiny.

And in Vivienne’s life, we saw abundant evidence of the fruit of the Spirit. She was joyful in her faith. She was kind and generous. She always had time for people. She was a good neighbour to Janet and I.

She was faithful to her friends. She was patient, especially with children, which made her a marvellous teacher. She was gentle and self controlled.

Vivienne build on firm foundations, and grew more like Jesus.

People might say she was a bit of a character, with her love of classic cars, the way she dressed and the way she kept her books in strict order. But more important, in her life she had developed true Christian character.

It is a privilege to have known Vivienne as a friend, neighbour, co-worker and sister in Christ. Of course we all miss her. But we can thank God for all she meant to us, and all she did to help build His Kingdom. And we can reflect too on what we can learn from a fruitful life built on firm foundations.