



I remember my first time picking blackberries. Uncle Bob rounded up a car full of us youngsters and we headed for Highland County with a trunk full of buckets. And if you know my uncle, we were also loaded up with a wealth of stories about Brer Rabbit and the such; there was no need for the radio, Uncle Bob keep us entertained!

Once arriving at the mountain pasture gate, Uncle Bob parked his Plymouth Fury and popped the trunk, handed us a bucket and pointed us in the direction of the briar patch. I remember that I was a little reluctant being the youngest and hoping not encounter the bear Uncle Bob had been storying about on the way there.

The patch was loaded with ripe berries and the day was filled with light. I stayed close to my older sisters, thinking I could out run them in case the bear drew near! After an hour or more, Uncle Bob announced that it was time to head home. My bucket was only partially filled since many of the berries I had picked, ended up in my belly instead of the bucket! This fact was easily recognizable by the berry stains all over my face! Heading home, I entertained thoughts about tasting Aunt Jeans' blackberry pie and homemade ice cream!

At that young age, I came to realize that in order to obtain the tasty fruit of life; I had to encounter the briar patches thorns. After the berry stains wore off, thanks to lye soap and Aunt Jean's elbow grease, the evidence of wounds and scratches on my arms, face and hands was obvious. It looked as though I lost a fight with an alley cat but the fruit I had collected was well worth it.

Obtaining the Fruit of the Spirit is a lot of work as well, and we will have to overcome the thorns and our scars to obtain it, but we must press on! St. John Climacus writes: "Do not be surprised that you fall every day; do not give up, but stand your ground courageously. And assuredly, the angel who guards you will honour your patience." To be more like Christ means that in our imperfection we must work toward gathering the fruits of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness and faith. And in this life, the greatest fruit is amongst the thorns: *Then Jesus came out, wearing the thorny crown and the purple outer garment. And Pilate saith to them, "Behold, the Man."* [Jn. 19:5] The Fruit of Life has been prepared! Taste and see that the Lord is good, Glory to Thee, O Lord, Glory to Thee!