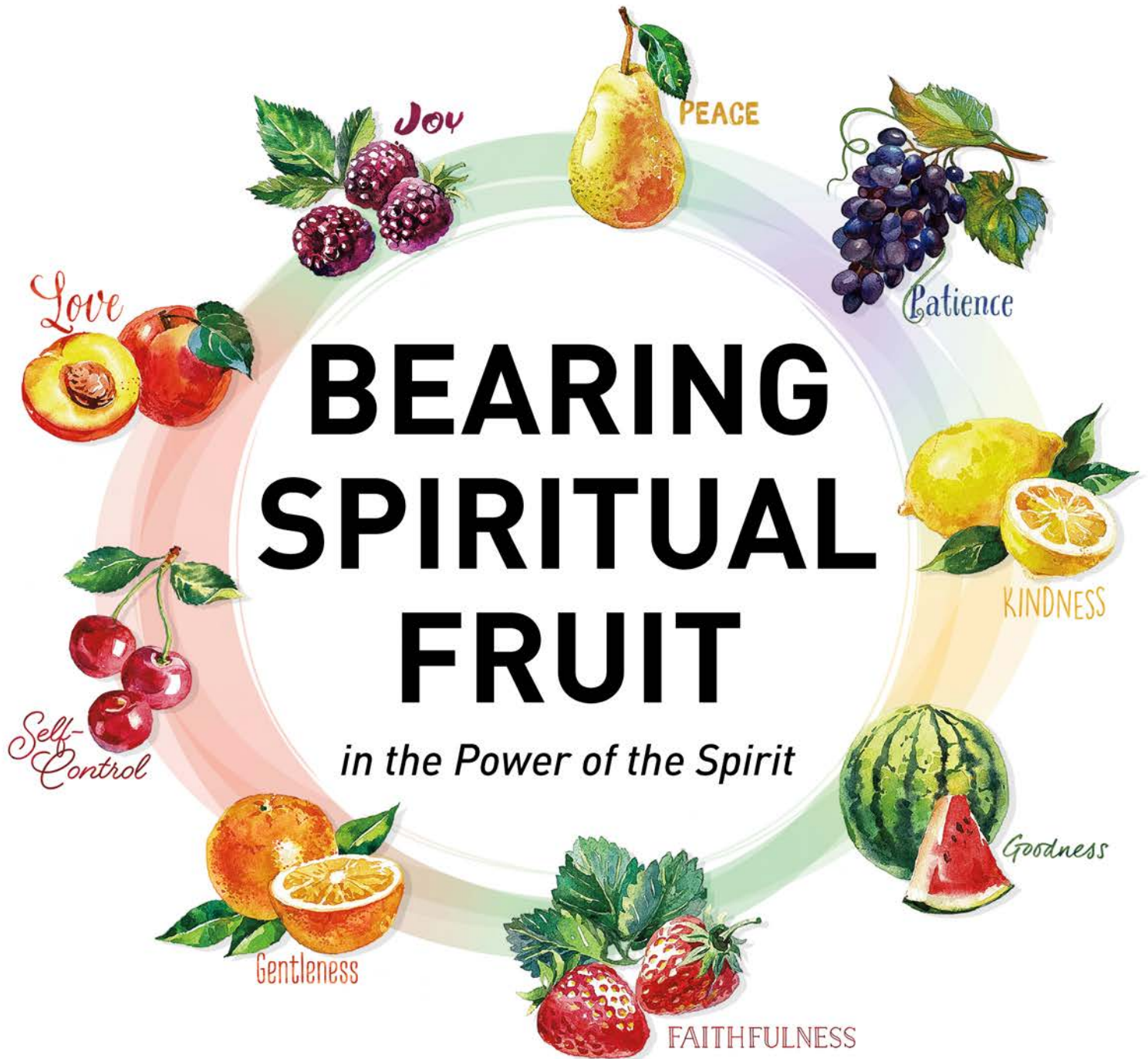


STUDY GUIDE WITH LEADER'S NOTES



Dr. David A. Slamp

Bearing Spiritual Fruit

In the Power of the Spirit

DR. DAVID A. SLAMP



Church**Growth**.org
Timeless Tools for Christian Growth

Dr. David A. Slamp has served as lead pastor, university professor, and discipleship pastor in churches up to 2,200 in attendance the past 30 plus years. David's breadth of experience has equipped him to train and develop small group leaders who produce radical life change. He is available to teach "radical small group" strategy at the local and area church levels. He is also a small groups consultant and missionary who has developed leaders nationally and trained over 5,200 leaders throughout 16 countries in Africa. Contact Dr. Slamp at dk_slamp@yahoo.com or at his web site, www.CareRingMinistries.com.

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Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

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Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Chapter One: By Way of Introduction

Welcome to the great adventure in growth! During our time together as a group (or alone, if studying individually) we will re-discover the biblical basis for being spiritually productive. We will see how our relationships, first with Jesus, and then with his Spirit, are essential to maturity and productivity. And, here you will think through (and often discuss) exactly where you need to pray more specifically, to listen to God more attentively, and/or to act more decisively so the Lord can produce his fruit in you. Welcome to the process!

Yours for an abundant harvest,

Dr. David Slamp

Bearing Spiritual Fruit is the heart desire of every true believer. When we are honest with ourselves, we *long* to live effectively and productively for the Lord. Ironically, that longing is infinitesimal compared to the price Jesus paid and the power available to us as God's Spirit is allowed to flow through us. Jesus' love for us followers is immense. "*There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends*" – Jesus (John 15:13). Further, "*the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groaning that words cannot express*" (Romans 8:26, NIV). As if that were not enough, in Acts 1:8 Jesus even promised that you and I can have the power of the Spirit active within us. The word Jesus used is the same one from which we get dynamite or dynamo. That is to say, when the living Spirit of God dwells within us we receive a power that makes us dynamic!

As a youth pastor while still in seminary, I learned how to share Christ with others and God gave me an earnest heart desire to actually have a part in leading someone to him. Sharing with others, try as I might, I soon came to the conclusion I was "not cut out to be a witness."

One evening while taking Jerry, one of my students, home after a teen event, the Spirit began to work. Jerry said, "Pastor Dave, I know kids who say they gave their lives to Christ. What does that mean?" I began to talk informally about what sin is and that we need Jesus to forgive us. I visited with Jerry about how much God loves us and therefore became our substitute so we don't need to die for our disobedience. That's about all it took...maybe 10 minutes total. But when I finished, Jerry said, "I think I want that." I offered to pray with him, and that night in Shawnee, Kansas, Jerry prayed to give his heart to God! Before we got out of the car at his house, he asked me to be with him as he went into the house and told his parents. He gave me the cigarettes in his pocket and asked me to throw them away for him.

In retrospect, I came to see that I was trying to be effective, not "letting God do it." I did all I could do to "make it happen"—to approach others and convince them they needed the Lord; a right motive with a clumsy man-made effort. And I failed miserably at it. All I needed to do was

release, not take hold. That experience taught me we need to allow God to act, more than convince him he needs to!

And that's the way it is with spiritual fruit. We need not stress about bearing fruit. You do not walk up to an apple tree and hear it groaning, straining to grow apples. It is an apple tree, for goodness sake! Orange trees or grape vines do not need to take classes in bearing oranges or grapes. Apples are what apple trees produce...not because they *try* to, but because that's what apple trees ARE!

When we are filled and empowered by God's Spirit, we too produce spiritual fruit. With us, classes probably help, but it is never *because* we took a class on kindness that we are kind. It is not because we study patience that we become patient, or even because we memorize verses on joy or love that we become joyful or loving. It is never because we work longer, pray louder, or even try harder that God bears fruit in us. It is because he IS... and because he is in US! So relax. No straining allowed here! Just say to God, "I'm ready. Fill me and empower me with your Spirit. Flow through me and produce in me the grace of spiritual fruit."

About Growing Pears

For the past 3 years my wife and I have lived in Medford, Oregon, home of Harry and David...no, those are not a couple of my cousins. This is home to "the" Harry and David, a national company known for some of the finest fruit, nuts, and candy confections anywhere.

The growers throughout the Rogue Valley have a reputation for giving their vineyards and orchards excellent care. In the "off season" of winter, however, their work with the vines and branches appears to be brutal. They whack off branches and trim vines as though they were getting ready to cut them down. I am told that all this pruning is for the good of the crop. When pear trees are trimmed back, the nutrients flow to the branches with fruit on them. And the result is the juiciest Bartlett Pears you can imagine.

Like the workers in these pear orchards, God trims us back from time to time. During these times, it may appear to us he is out of touch, or even hurting us intentionally. In reality the Lord is producing good fruit through us. Unlike the trees, we have a choice. We can either resist and even fight back against God's work, or we can decide to submit to his pruning, assured that he knows exactly what we need and is doing his work for our benefit that we may "bear much fruit."

In the spring, the inevitable growing season arrives and soon the crop flourishes when the sunlight of Jesus has shined on us and the "streams of living water" seep into our roots. Like the pears, we will soon see the "fruit of the Spirit" giving evidence to everyone of exactly what kind of tree we truly are. Therein lies both the value and the power of bearing fruit. The proof of the tree is in the fruit, and it is also the evidence of a skilled grower and his talents.

To our knowledge, the only living thing Jesus ever cursed while on earth was the lonely fig tree that promised a crop, but was bare. He clearly taught that he is the vine and we are his branches. He added that, if the branch did not bear fruit it was fit for only one destiny... to be cut off and burned. The parallels and implications for us are both harsh and remarkably terrifying.

The vinedressers and orchard workers always have the product in mind, not the vine or tree. Whatever trimming the tree endures is insignificant compared to the value of the crop it produces. In our postmodern culture we have it reversed. Somehow we have come to believe we are the sole object of God's attention and work. We have come to think he and the fruit are both there for our purposes; that they both serve us. In his economy we are there for him and the fruit. So, when it appears life is whacking away at you, when there is only the empty cold of winter surrounding you, remember the fruit. Remind yourself that this season is to prepare you for His crop, not yours. We are the branches. Only he is the vine.

Two Clarifications

First, a balanced diet produces a healthy body. The Premise: God is after balance in our lives. When we think of the *fruits* of the Spirit rather than the *fruit* (collective plural) of the Spirit, we run the risk of picking and choosing. We are not to decide whatever we want God to produce in us. The fruit is not an unrelated collection of fruit from which we can select according to our preferences. This is why the Bible uses the term, "the fruit of the Spirit *is*..." and not, "*the fruits of the Spirit are*..." They are all important, and when they are all produced in us, we have evidence that God's Holy Spirit is active within.

Second, the importance or significance of the collective word "fruit" is obvious. When you try to imagine any fruit with the tanginess of a tangerine, the succulent sweetness of a pear, and the crisp tartness of an apple, it's fruitless! (Pardon the intentional pun.) In the same way that no single characteristic of God can define him, no one single fruit can express all God wants to produce in us. God's only purpose is not for us to be good. He intends for us also to have self-control. He is not finished with us when we are kind and loving. He also wants us to be full of joy and to be patient... Oops! That one may take some doing, right?

Why Use the *Fruit of the Spirit Assessment*?

Most believers have a general idea of where they stand with the Lord. They suspect they need to be more kind, patient, or even more loving in certain situations. However, those assessments are often very general. We could be more proactive finding ways and taking steps allowing the Lord to make us more mature and fruitful.

To make this study an even more significant process, we strongly encourage you to use the *Fruit of the Spirit Assessment*. Using this survey tool near the beginning of your study, either individually or together, will cause participants to focus on the fruits that they know need attention. Further, only in this way can participants have an objective and realistic basis for deciding where they need to mature and follow the Spirit more completely.

Take the *Fruit of the Spirit Assessment* as soon as you can. Circle the 3 or 4 areas you see where the Lord can strengthen you and flow through you producing fruit. Concentrate on sections in this study guide that deal with those areas. Allow God to do his work, in his time, his way! And enjoy the harvest!

Thinking It Through

1. Reflect on some specific qualities you would love for God to develop in you. List a few characteristics or strengths below...possibly some that are in the Fruit of the Spirit...
2. Has God allowed some things to be taken from you? ...maybe the loss of a loved one? ...perhaps a financial setback such as the loss of a job? ...possibly part of your health or other misfortune? What comes to your mind?
3. In retrospect, in what ways do you see that God brought something good out of the loss or hurt? Was there some result you did not expect? How do you see now that the Lord produced the fruit of patience in you, for example...gave you joy in the midst of suffering...or taught you to love in some way?
4. What's next? What are your next steps in following God through this study?
5. Let's pray.

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Chapter 2: Pass It On

Welcome to Chapter 2, “Pass it On”! As we begin our study, the concept and application of God’s love is perhaps the most vital and indispensable topic in the New Testament. The Bible teaches us that of the “big 3 graces,” faith, hope, and love, love is truly, *“The greatest of these.”* When we comprehend the significance of authentic and godly love, we capture the essence of God himself! *“God is love”* says it all. According to Jesus, loving God and others summarizes all 10 of the Commandments and is *“the first and most important command”* (Matthew 22:38).

Let’s see how this very love flows from the Father and Son through the Spirit to us, and how we, in turn, can live it out.

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER — *Biblical Foundation*

It all started with God, this love thing. Ultimately, the biblical foundation of love is God himself, and love always expresses itself toward others: *“This is real love – not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins”* (1 John 4:10, NLT). God’s love is always expressive and you and I are the fortunate recipients of that expression!

I am blessed by the words of the song, “The love of God...how rich and pure, how measureless and strong. It shall forever more endure the saints and angels song.” That’s what God’s love is. It is the highest and best love. Unlike the other types of love found in the New Testament—“*philia*” (mutual love, such as in Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love) or “*eros*” (a base grasping love from which we get our word, erotic), the love of God is “*agape*,” selfless and focused on the wellbeing of “the other.” It truly is measureless and strong!

The biblical foundation also includes us. You and I clearly have been integrated into the plan of love. Listen to how John put it in his first Epistle: *“And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their Christian brothers and sisters”* (1 John 4:21, NLT). Love is the one indispensable virtue in all quality relationships. One writer calls it the greatest of all theological virtues. And yet this remarkable love does not just develop. It must be nurtured.

The story is often told about David Wilkerson, founder of Teen Challenge in New York City. A young lady on his staff who wanted to

“Jesus answered, ‘You must love the Lord your God. You must love him with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and most important command. And the second command is like the first: ‘You must love other people the same as you love yourself.’”

Matthew 22:37-39
(ERV)



serve there told David she just didn't feel any love for those people. He gave her the location of a mother she was to go help. When returning after a hard day's work cleaning and serving the lady, this young girl joyfully announced that she then had feelings of love. She explained that the work had produced a profound compassion for this lady and that she was moved with love to serve.

That is true of us all. We cannot produce by ourselves what only God creates in us. Only when we serve him and live our whole life for the Lord does he produce in us the very fruit we long for. When we do not feel like loving others, and yet we serve them, we soon discover God's love flowing through us. Notice again that branches do not strain to produce a beautiful cluster of grapes. There is no stress involved in producing fruit. As long as the branch is connected to the vine and allows moisture and nutriment to be drawn up from the soil, it will produce clusters of attractive and delicious fruit.

So, how do we know who is connected? *"This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother"* (1 John 3:10). That's how we know... **"By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles"** Matthew 7:16 (NIV). The character and virtues in a person's life reveal what they are. And these qualities cannot be faked!

A person may rescue a drowning victim or risk his or her life to save someone in an accident. Those deeds of heroism reflect the compassion of God. Even some, who have not professed to believe in the Lord, have been overwhelmed by some inexplicable inner impulse to act when they see another about to die. That spark is from God and it is what ignites us to care, to dare, and to risk even our own lives for others. It is God's grace flowing through us even when we are unaware he is there!

STAYING CONNECTED — *In Spiritual Relationships*



Not only does divine love start with God and His Son, but Jesus has set the example AND instructed us to pass that love to others. *"He said, 'Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples'"* (John 13:35). Jesus is clear on this. When we love others, we demonstrate that we truly are His followers. That's how we demonstrate and even prove our relationship with him to the world.

Further, Jesus has passed on to us the challenge to be loving regardless of the circumstances or cost. His requirements are both amazing and scary. *"So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other"* (John 13:34, NLT). He loves us with an everlasting love, and with a love that endured every trial, every temptation, every scar and brutal treatment mankind has known. Yet, the Spirit gave him victory. Reference to this Spirit is made later, as he hung on the cross, when he said, *"Into Thy hands I commend my Spirit."* Through the indwelling Holy Spirit God empowers to withstand every conceivable trial and evil imaginable. When he is within us God's love flows through us and he bears the tender succulent fruit of love...*agape*.

Maxie Dunnam and Kimberly Dunnam Reisman wrote, “For Paul, the Spirit is more than the manifestation of a supernatural power, more than the giver of dramatic gifts, more than an explosive force erupting in the believer now and then. The Spirit is the daily sustaining, inspiring, and guiding power of the Christian’s life.”¹ Only the Spirit can produce in us what we need. For this reason the Bible refers to the fruit “of the Spirit”; not *our* fruit, whatever *we* can produce, but that which only the Holy Spirit dwelling within us can bear.

BEARING MUCH FRUIT — *Application: Living It Out!*



In one sense all we need to do as the branch is stay connected to the Vine. God does the planting where He wills, the pruning however he wants, and the nourishing in the way that he chooses. Our part is to abide.

The literal meaning of “virtue” in Greek is power. In other words, the virtues of our daily lives are both evidence and even proof of God’s power within us. We are to discipline ourselves, yet that discipline does not produce the fruit. Self-discipline is the way we “abide in the vine.” It is the day-to-day habit of staying in contact with God, but that relationship or self-control does not do the work. God himself is our source. *“To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory”* (Colossians 1:27, NIV). *“It is God **who works in you** to will and to act according to his good purpose”* (Philippians 2:13, NIV).

Based on this understanding that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all involved in producing spiritual fruit, we realize how utterly vital it is to stay close to the Lord daily. Now we turn our attention to what it *means* to *apply* or live out this relationship. We know a lot about God’s love. It is kind, not rude or irritable, not selfish, patient, and on the list goes.

Read I Corinthians 13:4-8. Think about these qualities a few moments. Reflect on your own life the past few weeks. Where do you find it is most difficult to live these qualities out? Is it in being patient?...or in being kind?...What about envy?...or boastfulness?...or pride?

If we are all honest, each of us struggles at one or more of these points. With me it is being proud. I can easily assume that somehow what God has given me or whatever I have achieved has come from my work, talent, persistence, etc. In fact, little to *none* of my accomplishments are to my own credit. I don’t struggle much with being envious or with boasting, but this subtle pride can get in my way if I’m not careful. How about you?

The important thing is not the type of struggle that threatens us, but what we *do* with that struggle that counts. At any point we allow ourselves to get puffed up, impatient, unkind, or envious, that very point is the place our adversary can tap the love from our relationships with others. The devil knows your weaknesses. He is crafty and clever...no! He is *evil*! Resist him and God promises he will flee from you! Only then will we be free to let God’s love flow. At that very point you will bear the Christ-like fruit of love and pass it on to others.

A song I taught my teens to sing in the “New Experience Singers” choir when I was a youth pastor goes, “It only takes a spark to get a fire going. And soon all those around will warm up to

its glowing. That's how it is with God's love once you've experienced it. You want to sing. It's fresh like spring. You want to pass it on." I still love those words, don't you? Let's live them out! What do you say? Let's pass it on!

Thinking It Through

1. Reflecting on your childhood, *who* comes to mind of when you think about being loved? Name the person or persons who set the benchmark for you and first helped you understand what it means to love.
2. Take a few minutes and thoughtfully read I Corinthians 13:7-8. When you think of living out these behaviors, how do you feel? (Circle 2 or 3 words that best describe your response.)
Excited confident anxious doubtful
Challenged overwhelmed encouraged worried
3. Why did you circle what you did? Is there some history that causes you to feel the way you do about loving? Might you even struggle with some feelings of inadequacy?
4. Briefly describe what actions, words, or behavior taught you what it means to be loving. This may be an event, or how a person treated you, even the tone in someone's voice or their body language.
5. In what ways would you like the Lord to produce more of this fruit of godly love in you? Are there a few *specific* settings or people with whom you want to pray that God will produce his fruit of love?
6. Let's pray.

¹Maxie Dunnam and Kimberly Dunnam Reisman, *The Workbook on Virtues and the Fruit of the Spirit* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998), 104.

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Chapter 3: If You Want Joy

One of the earliest choruses I remember singing in church is the little tune, “If you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy, let Jesus come into your heart.” Do you remember? I love that tune...*and* the message.

For one thing, the chorus points out that the secret of authentic joy is a matter of the *heart*. Lots of people have Jesus in their life. They attend church regularly, read a few verses...on most days, go to Sunday school, even put a few dollars into the offering. But authentic believers have Jesus in their *hearts*, and that’s where biblical joy comes from. This joy was not invented by children on Christmas morning. Joy comes from the Greek work, *chara*, which means to celebrate, and is also translated, rejoicing, gladness or bliss. And the fruit of joy is produced by Jesus through the Holy Spirit within us.

Another point of the chorus is that we must allow Jesus to come into our hearts. Like the timely Warner E. Sallman’s painting, titled, “Christ at Heart’s Door,” Jesus is standing at the door of our hearts knocking. He must be let in from the *inside*. There is no latch on the outside of the door... thorns and thistles are growing there, but no latch. You and I are the only ones who can invite God into our hearts. And we are the only ones who can ask Him to give us the fruit of joy, “real joy, wonderful joy.”

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER — *Biblical Foundation*

As with all the fruit of the spirit this joy comes first and best from Jesus. Remember the little acrostic that answers, “How do you spell joy?” It is J = Jesus first, O = Others second, and Y = Yourself last. That is God’s priority system. The Lord endured the insults, suffered the beating, hung on the cross *willingly*. I am *convinced* because He was thinking of you and me—we are the “others” in His life! Hebrews 12:2 states that Jesus, “*who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross.*” How was Jesus so triumphant in suffering? Us! We had nothing to do with His victory, but we have *everything* to do with His enduring the shame, laying his very life down, and raising again from the dead. Jesus was probably not looking forward to the

*“But let all those
rejoice who put their
trust in You; let them
ever shout for joy,
because You defend
them; let those also
who love Your name
be joyful in You. For
you, O Lord, will
bless the righteous;
with favor You will
surround him as
with a shield.”*

Psalm 5:11-12
(NKJV)



“joy set before him,” meaning heaven, as much as the fact that you and I will some day be set before Him!

The Bible is clear that this joy is from God, in God, and for God. Paul included joy in his definition of what it means to be part of God’s Kingdom: *“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Romans 14:17, NIV).

Joy is from God in that it is part of the fruit of the Spirit: *“You taught me how to live. You will come close to me and give me great joy,”* Acts 2:28 (ERV) teaches us. (Also note Romans 15:13, Psalm 16:11, Isaiah 51:11, and Psalm 28:7 tells us joy comes from God.)

Joy is in God as the result of abiding in God. Notice that this joy is the result of abiding *“in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:7). Jesus states this as clearly as can be: *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me”* (John 15:4).

Joy is for God in that we are taught to *“Shout to God with joyful praise! For the Lord Most High is awesome”* (Psalm 47:2). According to Scripture, we are to be extravagant in expressions of joy to God. *“Everything on earth, shout with joy to God! Praise his glorious name! Honor Him with songs of praise”* (Psalm 66:1). Seeing all this, one quickly gets the idea that God desires our worship to sound more like cheering at a ball game than quiet reflection, though there is certainly a place for both.

Add to the above that Jesus wants our joy to be complete (John 15:11) and that this is *“... the joy given by the Holy Spirit”* (1 Thessalonians 1:6). Since Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, *“the world at large cannot receive him, for it isn’t looking for him and doesn’t recognize him”* (John 14:17), we see why those who are not believers cannot understand this joy. In fact, many are so dark in their faith that they do not even believe we are being honest to say we have peace in the midst of the storm. To them we appear to be “faking it”! They think we are making it up. If they only knew!



STAYING CONNECTED — *In Spiritual Relationships*

In 1943 Beryl was working in San Bruno, California, at a bag factory sowing and sealing cloth bags for servicemen during World War II. She had lived a rough life and had just lost her husband who ran off with another woman. Beryl was expecting a child, which made her plight even more traumatic. Esther Croy was a friend who worked with her in the factory. Esther, a Christian, reached out to Beryl and began loving her. Now abandoned and alone, Beryl accepted her invitation to a home Bible study and prayer time. Within three days she accepted the Lord into her life and was marvelously converted.

Beryl was overjoyed at the peace and freedom from guilt in her life, now reborn. Years later, with that abundant joy still radiating from her face, she witnessed, “I couldn’t get over the spirit of those people. It was unlike anything I had ever experienced. I couldn’t get away from

the overwhelming joy in that group of believers. I wanted that joy. I stayed awake for three nights talking to God in the only way I knew. Finally, in desperation I told the Lord, 'If you are really God, I want the kind of joy those people have. I give up everything for you.' When I said that, God came into my heart and with Him came an inexplicable peace like I had never known in my life!"

I know this story is true because Beryl is my mother, and that is the story of how she was converted just about the time I was born. Today, at age 89, my mom still has that joy on her face and in her voice as she shares her testimony. Her life was transformed, and with it came resounding joy. Like the chorus says, "...your sins He'll wash away. Your night He'll turn to day. Your life He'll make it over anew." The new joy produced in my mom's heart was the result of someone's love; first, that of Jesus Christ, and also that of Esther Croy, who led my mom to the Lord. Beth Moore wrote, "Love melts the heart of stone. Joy touches the deepest part of that heart. We need joy, and our world needs believers who evidence the fruit of joy."¹

There is another biblical truth in that story. It is the relationship between joy and the peace that accompanies it. Philippians 4:4-7 lays it out: *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice...and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* Perhaps Maxie Dunnam and Kimberly Reisman put it best when they wrote, "The fruit of the Spirit are not isolated from each other; they overlap in meaning and expression."² Isaiah's prophesy promised both: *"You will live in joy and peace"* (Isaiah 55:12, NLT) .

BEARING MUCH FRUIT — Application: *Living It Out!*



So, how do we achieve this joy? Are there steps to take or is there a formula by which we can be joyful? Those questions make sense, because there is a longing in our hearts for this godly joy. People strive for happiness, and yet this is one of those qualities you cannot produce or achieve by working harder. It's like the title of the book about humility that betrays the author... *My Great Humility and How I Achieved it!* The U.S. Declaration of Independence gives us the wrong impression with the phrase, "the pursuit of happiness." The irony is that you don't achieve joy by hunting it down. God does not tell us to seek for joy or pursue happiness. They are the remarkable byproducts of being filled with the Holy Spirit. One writer said, "Joy is not something we produce on our own. Rather, it is a supernatural result of belonging to the one who is pure joy."³

Living out this fruit of joy is the result of three situations or factors in our relationship with Christ: One is to see suffering as God does. His objective in allowing us to be hurt or suffer loss is to build character into us. Even when shipwrecked, imprisoned or beaten, the New Testament disciples rejoiced because *"they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name..."* (Acts 5:41 and similarly in James 1:2-3). A second factor is one in which we look steadfastly to Jesus. Hebrews 12:2 reminds us to *"fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."* Nothing is more inspiring than to meditate on the passion of Christ. He is the very embodiment of endurance, patience, peace, and all spiritual fruit. The third factor is to allow

the Holy Spirit to produce joy within us. Jesus desires that our joy will be complete (John 15:11), and 1 Thessalonians 1:6 refers to *“the joy given by the Holy Spirit.”*

Remember the day of Pentecost? The believers were so filled and empowered with the Holy Spirit that they poured into the streets glorifying and praising God. They were so joyful that others thought they were intoxicated (Acts 2:13). Now, filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter (who earlier had denied even *knowing* Jesus to a servant girl, by the way) stood to preach the world’s first sermon, and 3,000 people accepted Jesus that day. Their joy was overflowing! They said that they could not *help* but tell all they had seen and heard.

Have you had your day of Pentecost? Jesus said to the Apostles, referring to the Holy Spirit, *“He is with you. He shall be in you”* (John 14:17). In Acts 1:8, he promised, *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.”* This shows that Jesus’ will is for us to be filled with His Spirit in this life. We see that promise fulfilled in Stephen, Peter, Paul, and in the churches in Jerusalem, Samaria, Ephesus, etc.

Thinking It Through

1. Have you ever been surprised by joy as I have? I mean, have you been in the middle of some trial, or facing some severe loss, or enduring some pain only to be startled by the realization that you had joy resonating within? When was that?
2. From the chorus, “If you want joy” (and the many Scriptures on the subject), what is *the key to receiving* the joy? In two or three sentences describe how you did, or how you need to, “let Jesus come into your heart.”
3. Like the disciples of Jesus on the Day of Pentecost, have you come to the place that the Holy Spirit has filled you? Do you know what it’s like to surrender everything to Him...to “sell out” to the lordship of Jesus? What are the important factors for this to happen according to Acts 1:8, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, and Romans 12:1-2? Who does the work of making us holy (Jesus’ word was “sanctification,” which means, “to make holy.”)
4. If you haven’t taken them yet, what are your next steps toward making a complete commitment? What do you want to do toward giving God control of your life in every way?
5. Let us pray.

¹Beth Moore, *Living Beyond Yourself, Exploring the Fruit of the Spirit*. (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2007) 73.

²Maxie Dunnam and Kimberly Dunnam Reisman, *The Workbook on Virtues and the Fruit of the Spirit* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998) 135.

³Thomas E. Trask and Wayde I. Goodall, *The Fruit of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000) 44.

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Chapter 4: Peace Like a River

As a youth worker at camps in Southern California for 11 years, I learned to love the kids and enjoyed working with them. There were surprises every year...some new prank, pushing the envelope a bit farther than anyone had the year before. Never a dull moment!

We always experienced one unalterable and inevitable element: Year after year, before the week was over, I could count on us singing, "I've got peace like a river...in my soul." This is not a bad chorus, actually. In fact a couple other versions included joy and love, kind of a "Fruit of the Spirit" chorus, you might say.

These qualities of peace, love, and joy may sound virtually foreign to our Twenty-First Century ears. There is a reason for that. This technological and highly impersonal world leaves us fractured and disoriented from the close personal relationships that God intended us to have. Today a person can purchase groceries, make a deposit at the bank, and buy gas, all without ever talking with a person. Philip Kenneson states this predicament eloquently:

"...In the electronic age of telephones, faxes and email, we often have contact with countless numbers of people to whom we remain all but anonymous. In short, we regularly find ourselves moving in a dizzying number of settings whose expectations are radically different. The result is often a sense of fragmentation, a disturbing sense that not only our lives but also our very identities are fractured into scores of isolated if not contradictory fragments."²

Today is clearly a day in which this study is appropriate for us. This study draws us back to the qualities of the inner life that can keep us centered and offer order to our relationships and world around us. In short, we need all of the Lord, and as much as we can of this spiritual fruit. The love, the joy, and the peace God offers us are profoundly welcomed qualities and the characteristics that empower us to cope!

Not surprisingly, the joy of the Lord and the peace of God actually go together. In Philippians 4:4-7 the two are directly related to one another. Paul emphatically tells us to "Rejoice in the Lord always," and makes it clear that then, "the peace of God...will guard your hearts and minds." Let's look closer at these verses and others that

Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice.

Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near: Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

... And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:4-7

provide the biblical foundation upon which this relationship is constructed, or we might say, from which it flows “like a river.”

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER -- *Biblical Foundation*



When we examine the Philippians 4 passage more carefully, we see the process by which God produces peace of heart and mind. Notice there are two dimensions to this “river of peace”; a horizontal and a vertical quality.

1. We are taught to let our gentleness be known to everyone and that we should not worry about anything. That covers both the relationships and circumstances in our lives. Perhaps this is where “peace of mind” comes from, the horizontal work of God in and through us.
2. We are instructed to include both thanksgiving and supplication in our “vertical” prayer relationship with God. Doing so gives praise to God and shows reliance upon Him. No doubt, this leads to “peace of heart.” This must be an ongoing process so that God continually guards our hearts.

This interdependence of each of the qualities illustrates more clearly that the Fruit of the Spirit is a collective noun, and that these characteristics are produced by the Spirit in us as we follow Him. Maxie Dunnam and Kimberly Reisman wrote about these varieties of fruit: “Some have special connections. Joy and peace go together. Neither is dependent upon circumstances. Both are by-products of obedience.”¹ Romans 15:13 promises, “*God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him.*” Elsewhere the Bible promises that God, “*will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You*” (Isaiah 26:3). Again there is the element of continually focusing on God and concentrating on Him.

Got questions? Exactly, what is meant by this peace? Does the Bible assure us that we will not have problems or ever be upset? And if we do become irritated, does that mean we are no longer Christians?

First, peace involves a state of harmony, well-being, and wholeness that impacts all relationships. The Hebrew word is “shalom.” God plans for us to have true and lasting peace. Jesus told us, “*I’ve told you these things, so that in Me you may have perfect peace and confidence*” (John 16:33). We can be sure that inner peace comes only from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We also know that Jesus wants us to have complete peace...“*perfect peace.*” When we have his perfect peace, that inner peace radiates into every situation and through every relationship we have.

If you are normal, you will have problems. That’s life. However, when those problems begin eating at you, keeping you awake at night, and giving you heartburn, rest assured the “concern” you have is out of control and that the resultant absence of peace is *NOT* from God. On the other side, we’re not completely sure how God provides the peace. To me, it is purely an act of grace. Yet, exactly how God provides it is confusing. Philippians 4:7 admits this in that the “peace of God, that is beyond all understanding” guards our hearts and minds.

While God does not *plan* for us to become upset or irritated, as though we were taking the weight of the world on our shoulders, He does *provide* for us whenever we do. First, He provides when our minds are stayed, or fixed, on Jesus. Second, God's will is that *"the peace from Christ [will] rule in our hearts"* (Colossians 3:15). Jesus himself promised to give us peace (John 14:27). When we don't have His peace within, that indicates we are out of sync with him. Consequently, his river of peace cannot flow through us toward others. So, how do we "stay connected"? What are some elements in this relationship with God that will keep his peace flowing?

STAYING CONNECTED – *In Spiritual Relationships*



Perhaps the most obvious answer to, "what keeps His peace flowing through us?" is Jesus' teaching on abiding. In John 8:31 we are taught to *"abide in my word, then are you truly my disciples"* (ASV). Later, Jesus says we are chosen and appointed, *"that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide"* (John 15:16). But the core of the truth about abiding is in John 15:4-7 where Jesus gives us two remarkable promises through the process of abiding.

1. He promises that we will bear fruit. *"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can you, except you abide in me"* (v. 4).
2. He promises that prayer will be answered. *"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever you will, and it shall be done unto you"* (v. 7).

One can only conclude that this abiding thing is *essential*! Our lives and His work both depend on us being directly and vitally connected with Him. This relationship includes obedience. *"If you keep my commands, you shall abide in my love"* (John 15:10). Not abiding is serious business. *"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned"* (John 15:6, ASV).

I live in Medford, Oregon. For nearly a century the Rogue Valley has produced some of the highest quality pears and grapes in the Northwest. Home of Harry and David, the huge mail order packing plants, this valley floor is literally covered with hundreds of acres of pear trees. There is even a Pear Blossom Parade every spring to celebrate the new crop. I have walked near those orchards, and smelled the blossoms. I have watched as the groves were harvested. Never have I heard a Bartlett tree groan. They neither complain nor strain to produce the crop. When you walk through the trees there is no sign of tension or struggle to grow the fruit. It just hangs there. The fruit is the normal and inevitable outgrowth of the *nature* of the tree to which it clings. It is abiding. This analogy has two applications.

Can you keep that picture in mind? Can you capture a vision of being irrevocably and permanently connected to THE Tree of Life? If so, you will nurture the concept of abiding. And that relationship is the one we must maintain for Christ to produce the tender juicy fruit of peace.

Similarly, this analogy can apply to us and to the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit in our lives. There's an intriguing phenomenon around this valley. Grape vines never produce pears. And pear trees never...I *mean never*...bear grapes. It simply doesn't happen! Why, do you suppose? It's pretty obvious, right? The nature of a pear tree produces exactly what that tree is, a pear tree. And grape vines, by their nature, bear what they are, grape vines. Now, think of your life. Whatever you are producing is the direct result of what you are. Your *nature* determines what shows up in your attitudes, your relationships, your whole lifestyle.

There is an interesting sidebar here: This is precisely why Jesus explains to us, *"By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles"* (Matthew 7:16, NIV). The way you can identify a person is by the spirit, the attitude, the character he/she produces—by the fruit their lives bear.

Notice the word, "recognize" in Matthew 7:16. This means we are only identifying what is already there. Sometimes people dismiss this verse and its meaning because they have confused observation with adjudication. When I look at a bunch of grapes, I am not judging them. They are showing what they are. When you pick up a pear and eat it, you did not judge it determining whether it was a pear, an apple or an orange. You only identified what it was. It reveals what it is by its shape, its size, color, texture, and taste.

That is what Jesus is teaching us to do. Identify, not determine or judge, what people are. We show others our nature by our lives. They don't need to do any judging to spot whether or not we are genuine. This is one reason James tells us that he will show us his faith by his works. Faith and works are related. The condition of the tree or vine determines the fruit. No one needs to judge it. The fruit says it all!

Nowhere is this more true than in this area of peace. Life can "rattle" you. The breakneck schedule and pressure of endless tasks easily force us to yield to the tyranny of the urgent. True peace comes only from the Lord. *"And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give,"* Jesus taught (John 14:27 NIV). And He said, *"I've told you these things, so that in Me you may have perfect peace and confidence"* (John 16:33). Abide in Jesus. Have peace.

BEARING MUCH FRUIT – Application: *Living It Out!*



So, how does this bear out? Exactly how can we live this out in daily life? Some classic verses answer this very question. They are some of my favorites: *"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:6-7).

Those are simple, yet profound, instructions. Here is a great formula for letting peace flow "like a river in my soul." We may break them down this way:

1. Don't worry.
2. Always pray.

3. Tell God what you need.
4. Thank God for his work.
5. Let His peace rule!

I know the adage, “Why worry when you can pray?” is a bit trite, but it’s a poignant question nevertheless. Why would we? Someone explained it this way: There are really only two things you should never worry about. One is the category of things you *can’t* do anything about. If you *can’t* do anything about them, worrying won’t help either! The other category of things you *can* do something about. If you can do something about them, *go do it!* Worry won’t change those things either.

Gaining the peace of God may involve some work. If you have long since sensed peace slip quietly out of your life, perhaps you need spiritual therapy. The following three-step process will help you pursue peace if it has eluded your grasp.

First, Reflect and Release your past. You may have experienced some hurts for which you have not been forgiving. You might have anger or even resentment over past offenses. You may even have committed sins for which you have never repented. Give yourself a few hours of reflection over a period of a week or so. Pray with an open heart. Listen to God with an open mind. Then, obey whatever he tells you to so you are free and the peace can fill your heart again.

Second, Reevaluate your present. Often people, circumstances, even our surroundings can war against peace. You may not be directly involved, but none of us is above the pain of a turbulent storm raging around us. Peace may have escaped you through turmoil or tension in others in your life. Often we can do nothing about those people or situations. But sometimes we can. Reevaluate where you are, whom you are with, and why you are there. If the Lord wants you to change any of those things he will show you if you listen and respond to whatever he says.

Third, Renew your commitment to the future. If anything has shown up as you reviewed the past and reevaluated the present, you have learned some wonderful lessons. You may have made mistakes or even committed sins you that you can now commit not to repeat. You have a wonderful privilege of growing in knowledge. Now grow in grace. Submit yourself and your future to God. As the song says, “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus than to trust and obey.”

Thinking It Through

1. One of the absolute best things you can do is to take the three steps we just covered. Looking with an open heart at the past, evaluate your life today, and commit to belong totally to God in the future. This inevitably produces peace. Does any of that fit you? If so, lay out a plan (perhaps to cover two or three weeks) in which you step through that process.

2. How do you see God producing peace in your life? Have you recently been surprised by the peace Jesus gave you? Write down two or three examples. Take a moment to literally thank God for that blessing.

3. In the five-step “formula for letting peace flow,” where do you get stopped? Is there some blockage of the “peace like a river” hindering you from spiritual rest? If so, write it down here. Confess it to the Lord if you need to. Turn it over to him.

4. Pray specifically for peace. Intentionally identify anything that comes to your mind as you pray that might be blocking God’s peace from your heart. Tell the Lord that you now accept his peace. Thank him for his work in you.

¹Maxie Dunnam and Kimberly Dunnam Reisman, *The Workbook on Virtues and the Fruit of the Spirit* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998) 135.

²Philip D. Nenneson, *Life On The Vine: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in Christian Community* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1999) 82.

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Chapter 5: Fast-Track Patience

This is the day of the microwave, of instant oatmeal, fast cash, and instant-on TV. We have grown accustomed to drive-through eating, express lines, and instant messaging. Our schedules are overbooked, our accounts are overdrawn, our income is overtaxed, and our credit is overextended. We are products of fast-track living. And for many of us this fast track has degenerated into a rat race...a laborious and seemingly endless chain of events linked into an already overscheduled day.

Actually, when we stop to think about it, perhaps, “*these* are the days that try men’s souls.” As we approach the breaking point, and relationships reach the boiling point, we find ourselves responding to the tyranny of the urgent and impatient tolerance of those around us. With God, we struggle to give him a daily time and place, even when he has given us 16 waking hours every day.

Perhaps these are the reasons the idea of patience seems so obtrusive to us at best, and repugnant to us at the worst. We are faced with the oxymoron of “fast-track patience.” We live in the express line and on the express lane, and yet, God wants us to “be still and know...”

Waiting on the Lord feels like an obtrusion into our lives. Still, waiting is exactly what God asks for us so we can experience all he wants to give us. We have his Word on that. “*But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint*” (Isaiah 40:31, TLB).

I’ll be honest. This chapter hits me between the eyes. Perhaps you are somewhat like me at this point. In preparing for this project I read between 10 and 12 books on the Fruit of the Spirit. About the fourth or fifth chapter, on patience, I struggled to keep focused on this study. The reason was that this subject, more than any other, challenges my own life personally. Just when I think I have my life organized.—you know, manageable and structured—WHAM! Along comes a delay, an interruption, some unexpected problem that I must tend to. And there it is. There is the very point at which God tests my willingness to let his Spirit flow through me producing patience. I am learning that I must keep my guard up at this point, or my impatient can result in being edgy with others or irritated over their needs.

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Colossians 1:10-12
(NIV)

(Actually, we'll soon see that the Bible addresses the need to be patient with both people and circumstances.)

So, let's see how the Word can help us deal effectively with fast-track patience. In the middle of our express lane living, what insights and directions do we have so we can "*Be patient with everyone*" (1 Thessalonians 5:14, NLT).

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER — *Biblical Foundation*



In the New Testament the Greek word translated patience (and sometimes, "long-suffering") is *macrothumia*. This is actually a compound word from *macro* meaning "long" and *thumos* or "temper." So the person who is patient has a long temper. We have all heard of short-tempered people, those one who lose patience easily. God wants us to be long tempered or patient. This patience is clearly the product of the Holy Spirit

The second Greek word, normally translated "persevere," is *hupomone*. It also means endurance or steadfastness. Second Timothy 3:10 and Colossians 1:10-12 have an interesting distinguishing application of these two Greek words. *Macrothumia* is used as patience with others, while *hupomone* involves endurance in difficult circumstances or suffering. God's priority is always with people, rather than with circumstances. So, patience is a Fruit of the Spirit. While enduring trying situations is important, being patient with people is vital.

One other word study observation: Each of the qualities, endurance and patience, has an opposite. The opposite of endurance is "loss of hope" or, even worse, retaliation. And the opposite of patience or long-suffering is *krino*, meaning, "to pass judgment on."

Before we go further, here are a few excellent definitions of patience: "Patience means making a daily decision to trust and obey God, even when things aren't going the way you planned."¹ Maxie Dunnam wrote, "Christian patience is dependent upon our belief in a Sovereign God who is in control, who is at work in the world, and who will not forget any one of us."²

Building on Dunnam's statement, the key that opens the door to patience is to see everything from God's point of view, with his purposes in mind. This is God's perspective. When you and I truly and genuinely see life under God's control, we trust him. This trust takes fretting from us (Ps. 137) and enables us both to endure hardship and be patient with others, and with God himself. Don Aycock wrote, "Patience, as part of the fruit of the Spirit, is the deep, personal knowledge that God is working in your life and in His world." He says, "Patience...is active participation in the will of God, and not just passive waiting."³

The Lord wants us to turn the key of seeing from his perspective by listening to him. This is both simple and excruciating at the same time! Listening is not hard. *Hearing* is profoundly more difficult, even painful. It is because of the fast-track lives we live. We are so used to having our ears filled with noise, our eyes flashed with images, and our lives bombarded with messages, that we struggle to hear "the still small voice. But that is *precisely how* God reveals his will to us.

Like all of the fruit, patience comes from the Holy Spirit and is characteristic of God himself. Numerous times, Old Testament Scripture says, *“The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love”* (Psalm 103:8, Numbers 14:18, and Psalm 86:15, for example). It says, *“[God] is patient with you”* (2 Peter 3:9). And God wants to pass on the characteristic of patience to us.

STAYING CONNECTED — *In Spiritual Relationships*

Perhaps the most significant way to stay connected with God through this process of patience is to find meaning and purpose in the situation. Don Aycock writes about a great insight from Dr. Martin Groder, a business consultant and psychiatrist. He calls patience “strategic waiting.” That means, that when faced with a delay or waiting for some problem to be solved or prayer to be answered, do not simply sit idly by waiting and hoping for the best. Groder says, “strategic waiting...is the ability to wait actively, to think and plan, and not to jump to hasty conclusions before getting the facts.”⁴

When I had been pastor at a wonderful church in El Paso, Texas, about four years, both my wife Kathy and I had a persistent unexplainable sense that God was going to be moving us to another church. There were no reasons that we could put our finger on. No one had said anything to either of us about it. We just had a feeling. For literally months we could not explain that sense, but nothing happened. No calls.

Early in our conversations, we determined that if we were right and God was going to take me to another pastorate, we should give our best until whatever was to be happened. We spent extra time in prayer. Kathy and I visited almost daily and both of us gave ourselves to extra study and Bible reading. Our rationale was that, whether or not God was leading us somewhere else, we wanted to be prepared. We’d both be better for the extra study and prayers either way. In retrospect, that was “strategic waiting.” It involved both waiting for something, and, more importantly, waiting before God. In God’s time, I received a call to pastor a congregation that would be one of the highlights in our lives for seven years.

A striking illustration of how God is working to develop us comes from the parable of the potter working on a vessel. When the pot is on the wheel, and the potter discovers that there is a flaw, he does not throw the whole thing away. Instead he breaks it down and removes the “unyielding lump” of clay. He then reshapes it and molds it into the form he wants it to be. The value of clay is increased dramatically when it is shaped into the form of a pitcher or vessel of some sort. Then it is useful. It serves a purpose higher than its own existence. In the ground it was clay. That’s it. But, when lovingly shaped by the skillful potter, it becomes a worthwhile and valuable item.

The Lord...is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance... Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace...regarding the patience of our Lord as salvation.



That's exactly the way it is with us. When we are faced with a delay and become impatient, God is trying to remove that unyielding lump within us. He is forming us for his greater purposes. The implication is clear: If you want to be used by God, let him form you. Allow God to shape you as it fits his purposes. At the heart of this powerful work the Lord wants to perform in you, you must yield. Just as God is patient with us, we must be patient with him and his work on us. We must trust and obey...for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus. During the time between seeing what God wants to do, and his doing it, give yourself to his purposes. If you believe God is leading you into a marriage, get close to him so you can sense his guidance. If you sense the Lord is getting you ready for service, commit to preparing yourself so you will give him the best person you can be. This is "strategic waiting." To put it another way, Aycock says that as part of the fruit of the Spirit, patience is the deep personal knowledge that God is working in your life and in his world. Built on that trust, strategic waiting involves action to find purpose and take advantage of the circumstance...an act of faith.

By taking advantage of the delay or interruption two things happen simultaneously: 1) We are finding purpose in the problem and, consequently, are developing patience...patience with a purpose. 2) We are becoming better in other ways, turning the delay into a benefit for us as persons in other areas. If we look for it, we will find some values in the waiting process. When a loved one is ill for an extended period and we pray for them, in that process we become more earnest prayers. We also are becoming more empathetic toward others who are suffering extended illness.

An observation: Becoming patient is similar to acquiring humility in one sense. We cannot acquire patience *now*, and we cannot be proud of our humility! One disqualifies the other in each case. Becoming patient implies a process and humility denies pride.

BEARING MUCH FRUIT — Application: *Living It Out!*



It is helpful to learn what the Bible says, challenging to understand what it means, but overwhelming to live it out. That's *why* we must have the Holy Spirit empowering and enabling us, and that's what this section is all about...living it out. James wrote, *"You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger, for your anger does not produce God's righteousness"* (James 1:19-20). This way of living is putting feet to our faith so that when the time comes we will be ready.

Think of it this way: When a farmer plants a crop he then goes about other work on the farm...repairing a plow, tending the cattle or sheep, fixing a roof. But at the point the farmer is through planting, he gives control to the elements. The elements are to the farmer what the Holy Spirit is to us. He nourishes the plans and dreams we have planted with rain, air, and sun. It is in His hands. But that does not mean we do not need to prepare for the harvest. He (and we) still go about the business of repairing and developing other elements in our lives. James actually says this same thing. *"Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early*

and the late rains. You must also be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near” (James 5:7-8).

As we discussed elsewhere, each fruit builds and relates to the others. I believe there is a God ordained order to the list in Galatians 5:22-23. If the Holy Spirit is producing love, joy, and peace, the natural byproduct of those is patience. This is not to say that when the first three are in order we might not have a struggle, nor that we do not need to cultivate patience.

Finally, there is an inverse correlation between patience and peace we studied earlier. While many would argue that patience follows peace and that each fruit follows those before, we should also consider that impatience can impede our progress and take away our peace. Yet, more often than not, patience is a necessary prerequisite to establish peace in our lives; for, only by being patient can we find lasting peace.

Thinking It Through

1. In this study on Fast-Track Patience, on what points has the Holy Spirit spoken to your heart? Jot down a couple items that peaked your attention about slowing down and developing patience.

2. To develop patience which of these steps might you take in the immediate future.
 - ☐ Devote more quality time to listening as well as praying. How much more?

 - ☐ Intentionally look for a purpose in some delay right now.

 - ☐ Develop myself in these areas while I am waiting (strategic waiting).

 - ☐ Ask the Lord to check me whenever I am “losing it” becoming impatient.
 - ☐ Other: _____

3. The Spirit of God produces patience within us, as well as the other graces and the rest of the fruit. How might you draw closer to the Holy Spirit? Can you note a few steps to take in prayer, Bible reading, journaling, so the Spirit could use those disciplines to grant you more of his patience?

4. Close in prayer offering yourself in a fresh way to God with renewed commitment to listen, trust, and obey.

¹Larry Kreider & Sam Smucker, *Growing the Fruit of the Spirit* (Lititz, Pennsylvania: House to House Publications, 1996), 73.

²Maxie Dunnam & Kimberly Dunnam Reisman (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998), 151.

³Don M. Aycock, *Living by the Fruit of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999), 54.

⁴Ibid. p. 53.

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Chapter 6: Level 2 Kindness

Most writers today would agree that love is the cornerstone in this foundation of spiritual fruit. In 1 Corinthians 13 love, “*suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely; does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil...*” Wow! This love really does it all! And, of course, as Paul wrote, “the greatest of these (faith, love, and hope), is love.” We all agree. From love every other grace flows with sincerity and authenticity. All other qualities and characteristics of genuine Christianity seem to flow from this core virtue, love.

There is, however, another picture of this “flow” in the spiritual graces. It presents the more human side, more of *our* part in adding one virtue to another. In 2 Peter 1:5-7 one worthy merit is added to the others, from the basic to the complex. Peter started with the somewhat elementary qualities of goodness and knowledge. He adds the more intense disciplines of self-control and patience. These are followed with service and kindness. Finally he concludes that the crowning element is love. It is clear that kindness without love is incomplete.

Either way you prefer to look at the flow, kindness is right in the middle of it all. You might define kindness in terms of being gentle with pets, caring for poor people and those who are ill. Or, you may understand that kindness includes far more significant, and difficult, commitments: loving your enemy, turning wrath away with kind words, and doing good to those who spitefully use you. Either way, kindness is a pure and noble quality produced in us by the Holy Spirit.

In this section we’re going to look at two forms or “intensities” of kindness in detail. We want to understand this in biblical terms, not with simplistic thinking. We want to understand what Scripture teaches about the weighty expressions of kindness to see how it applies even in the more traumatic and tense situations. That’s “level 2 kindness”!

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER — *Biblical Foundation*

There is clearly biblical basis for what we might identify as human kindness. “*If a person is kind to poor people, then he*



...add these things to your life: to your faith add goodness; and to your goodness add knowledge; and to your knowledge add self-control; and to your self-control add patience; and to your patience add service for God; and to your service for God add kindness for your brothers and sisters in Christ; and to this kindness for your brothers and sisters add love.

2 Peter 1:5-7

shows honor to God" (Proverbs 14:31, ERV). The next chapter teaches, *"Gentle words are a tree of life"* (Proverbs 15:4a, NKJV). Elsewhere, *"If any person helps one of these little ones because they are my followers, then that person will truly get his reward. That person will get his reward even if he only gave my follower a cup of cold water"* (Matthew 10:42, ERV). And finally, *"Be sure that no person pays back wrong for wrong. But always try to do what is good for each other and for all people"* (1 Thessalonians 5:15, ERV).

These actions and the characteristic of kindness are admirable. This is the way God wants us to live our day-to-day lives, with grace and compassion. These qualities come from him actually. Jesus looked at the crowds and was moved with compassion. He felt sorry for them since they were worried and could not help themselves. He saw them, *"like sheep without a shepherd to lead them"* (Matthew 9:36, ERV). And in 2 Corinthians 1:3 Paul wrote, *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort."* God wants us to bear the same fruit. *"This is what the Lord of heaven's armies says: Judge fairly, and show mercy and kindness to one another"* (Zechariah 7:9, NLT).

Yet, there is a deeper and far more significant level of kindness. It is much more than seeing others' needs, caring about them, or even being gracious to other believers. We don't understand God's type of kindness until we understand kindness in the face of adversity. Proverbs 25:21 (ERV) shows us a powerful and even remarkable form of kindness. *"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat. If your enemy is thirsty, give him water to drink."* Jesus made it real clear: *"But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil."* NOW, we're talking KINDNESS! This is what I think of when I use the term, "level 2 kindness."

The Greek word for kindness is *"chrestotes,"* which means, "tender concern for others." It is the genuine desire to treat others graciously, just as Jesus treated everyone he met. It involves a tender heart.¹ Notice that no part of this definition qualifies *who* the others are. That means God's kindness is toward everyone...saint and sinner alike! It means he intends us to be as benevolent and compassionate with those who despise the Christian faith as we are with those who sit next to us in church. It implies that we must be just as quick to care and act with respect and consideration toward the abortionist as we are with a dedicated pastor of our church. That's level 2 kindness for sure!

This does not mean that we condone or agree in any way with the views or actions of those who oppose Jesus or his cause. We know God's view is to hate sin, but love the sinner. He wants us to have the same mindset. That is a REALLY tough one for us. It is VERY difficult for me to be kind with those I know oppose believers and everything they stand for. I must remind myself that God loves them. I have to *keep* asking, "What would Jesus do about them?" And we must *keep* asking ourselves that question, and then live out the answer under the Spirit's guidance.

We must also recognize that the all fruit of the Spirit go together in every regard. Not only is love irrevocably linked to kindness, but goodness is too. They all are. I love the way Beth Moore puts it: "Kindness and goodness are complementary aspects of the fruit of the Spirit. Without kindness, goodness becomes harsh and self-righteous. Without goodness, kindness becomes

indulgent tolerance. Only the Holy Spirit can balance and grow these essential qualities in our lives.”² Isn’t that great!

This understanding that only the Holy Spirit can produce those qualities and virtues is essential. He is our source. Jesus promised that “the Comforter” will be “in you,” that he will “teach you all things” and that he will “convict the world of sin” (John 15–16). The Spirit is God today! He is the here-and-now God, ever present with the Father and now with us!

Jesus promised a level of relationship for us that even the apostles did not possess as the Lord was there with them. He made it clear about the Spirit of truth. *“The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you”* (John 14:17, NIV). Right there it is! The Holy Spirit was “with” them, just not “in” them yet. Here’s one excellent way to understand this:

At that point Jesus had been ministering with the apostles for about three years. They had left their jobs, abandoned their families, followed him, and had seen the miracles and heard the messages. They were believers and they *were* followers. They had gone out two-by-two to witness and heal. They saw him raise Lazarus from the dead, make blind eyes see, and weak legs walk. They heard the parables, saw the miracles, walked on water, and even promised him they would never ever betray him. But they did, at least Peter did. The others sure were quiet during the whole arrest, trial, beating, and crucifixion. They had all the desire and no power. He was with them, just not “in” them! They had come under his influence, but were not yet under his control.

Now we come to a central and pivotal concept in living out God’s plan for us to bear the fruit of the Spirit. Paul gives an excellent example in Romans 7. He gets to the place in that spiritual biography that he *wants* to do good. He *agrees* that the law is good, even *delights* in the law. Those are his words! But, he is *powerless* to live it out. Sadly, he laments, *“I do not understand what I do. What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”* He goes on: *“For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.”* In verse 22 he even **delights** in God’s law.

Paul admits sin is still warring within him (even though he wants to do right. He knows “*the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good,*” Romans 7:12, NIV). In verse 18 he admits that there is still a “sinful nature” there, even though he is a believer. He identifies that it is “sin living in me that does it.” He puts it all together in verses 22 and 23, *“In my inner being I delight in God’s law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind.”* The result: “What a wretched man I am!”

Then comes Romans 8! Paul triumphantly announces, *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”* Even Paul’s desires and intents could not change him. But the Spirit could...and *did*! God produced his fruit in Paul and bore fruit through Paul’s ministry! Larry Kreider and Sam Smucker wrote, “Kindness is one fruit of godly Christian character you grow which helps you get fit for life! It does not just happen. Like the other fruit of the Spirit, kindness is within each Christian in seed form, but it must be grown through the action of the Holy Spirit with in you. Otherwise it will not be evident.”³ The Holy Spirit wants to give us the

fullness of his presence and power! The Spirit alive and active within us is the *only* way to level 2 kindness.



STAYING CONNECTED — *In Spiritual Relationships*

You may have read that early on believers were called “Kind Ones” more often than “Christians.” Interestingly, there is only one letter different in the Greek for kindness (chrestotes) than for Christ (Christos). When we think of Christ kindness is one of the primary qualities that comes to mind. Kindness is the opposite of self-centeredness, and Jesus was anything but self-centered or self-serving! And the closer we get to him, the more like Christ we become. When we think of staying connected in spiritual relationships, the first connection we must make is the one with Jesus.

Jesus appears to act out of character only once, when he “cleansed the temple.” That may appear to have been a temper tantrum, but, in reality it was righteous indignation, and the Lord acted *for* God and the relationship with him that had become tarnished through the temple practice of selling blemished animals (they were supposed to always be pure, free of disease and not crippled when sacrificed to God). On all other occasions we see Jesus acting out of compassion and treating others far more kind than others of his day.

He lived out level 2 kindness at one particular time in his life, the end. The three years or so of public ministry that led to this point was level 1 kindness in the routines of life. Level 2 is being kind when we are living life at its worst: When you have just lost a loved one and are suffering from grief, but still have time to be gracious to someone in your way. When you are struggling at work (or worse, have just lost your job) and yet speak lovingly to your wife and family. When you have been rejected or abandoned, whether real or it is just the *feeling* of abandonment, and still treat perpetrators kindly. This is level 2 kindness.

In these situations the Holy Spirit is at work, not us! He is active in our lives. Some years ago I felt rejected by some significant others in my life. When I look back to that time, I am amazed at the peace God gave me. More importantly, I am thrilled to be able to see then that I did not retaliate, did not scold, or lash back...even though I might have been justified to do so. I was experiencing level 2 kindness by the grace of God!

Kindness is not a virtue that can be borne by ourselves in isolation. We always see God developing us with the fruit of kindness *within community*. God actually IS community...the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. His first creative acts for humanity were to create man *AND* woman...community. The concept of his people as a family (community) was expressed through Abraham. In Moses God formed community expressed as a nation. In David community was expressed as a kingdom. Jesus gives us a striking illustration of kindness in community beyond the comfortable level with the parable of the Good Samaritan. We often forget that Samaritans were rejected as a people because the history during the Exile involved the Jews intermarrying with heathen people and giving up their Hebrew heritage for secular lifestyles. The Jews of Jesus’ day resented them and typically had nothing to do with them. So for the “good guy” in the parable to be a Samaritan stretched even the imagination of Jewish followers! This tension

is also the reason the Woman at the Well (Jacob's well was in Samaria) asked, "Why do you speak to me, a woman and a Samaritan?" No one ever did either of those things in public, except Jesus. He was displaying level 2 kindness...and changed her life!



BEARING MUCH FRUIT – Application: *Living it out!*

Some years ago I fell in love with a powerful little verse that has come to typify kindness to me. It says,

Oh the joy, the inexpressible joy of feeling safe with a friend.

Of neither having to weigh a thought nor measure a word.

But pouring them out, chaff and grain together,

Knowing that an understanding heart will accept that which is good

And will, with a breath of kindness, blow the rest away.

I love that statement! It implies that kindness in a friendship puts the best fabric on whatever we say or do. This is not license to offend someone. It is rather an affirmation that kindness in any relationship is the very characteristic that seals that affiliation with understanding, comfort, and security.

But what about level 2 kindness? How do we ever live *that one out*? Often when we are hurt, or have been rejected, and certainly when under severe emotional stress or intense financial pressure, those are the *very times* it is most difficult to live it out! But, exactly how do we come to this level of "Christ-likeness" in our daily walk? And how can we be more consistent doing it?

Those are important questions because only when we are kind under pressure, when we overcome evil with good (more on that in the next chapter), only when we express grace in the face of adversity, benevolence when confronted with hatred, and consideration when being hurt, do we know the Holy Spirit is active within us. Those circumstances are the proving ground of our faith and God's work! So, more on "how" to live this out:

For one, as we have discussed, those "extreme circumstances" are the very times the Holy Spirit can provide grace for the moment...and he does! In those situations we see all God is doing in us. Jesus asked, "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them." He goes on, "*If you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that*" (Luke 6:32-33, NIV). So, even the Lord is teaching us to identify authentic spirituality by what we do to seekers.

A second "how to" comes from within our own hearts. We are told to "stir up" the gift that is within us, to take initiative. The Lord said that we are to go the second mile when asked to go one. He taught us to be the yeast in the loaf, the salt of the earth, the city on a hill. Our commitment to grow in grace puts us in the place that he can do his work in and through us. When we take initiative God acts! We see this in the parable of the Good Samaritan. He took

initiative. He went the second mile. All his actions were self-inspired (in the right sense of the term). Only the Samaritan saw this bruised and robbed man as his neighbor.

A third way to grow in this area is by submitting. When we surrender to God and yield to his way of living we free ourselves from the egocentric motives that would otherwise hold us back. This is deeper than taking personal initiative or being pro-active. I'm talking about turning our attitudes, our actions, our words, our *entire lives* over to God. This involves surrendering ourselves, and yielding our wills, to the Lord. This is the tough one, but it is the only step of the three mentioned here that gives God the uncompromising right to make us his, thereby producing the fruit of the Spirit in us.

Bill Hybels once asked, "How much is a 95% commitment to God?" He answered his own question, "Not enough!" We can follow the Lord 95% of the time and still miss out. One man told Jesus he had kept all the laws since he was young. When he was told the one thing he still needed to do, he couldn't make the jump. He walked away sorrowfully. That he is a jealous God means he wants all of us! He's not pleased when the song of our lives is, "I surrender most of me." He wants, "I surrender *ALL*!"

Thinking It Through

1. Jot down what area(s) of your life are committed to God? Your past? Your sins? And what about your will? What percentage of your will belongs to God? Any part not yet surrendered? If no, what part is that?
2. Imagine a "Kindness Scale" from 1 to 10, where "1" means you don't kick dogs when they are in your way or cuss out the paper boy when he throws your morning paper under the sprinkler, and "10" is level 2 kindness, the type that glows in "the dark night of the soul." This authentic fruit is kind whatever! Where do you plot your kindness on the scale?
1 _____ 5 _____ 10
3. Do you need to take initiative at some point? For example, do you need to be more proactive with your family or coworkers being more gracious and kind to them when the going is tough? How about when you are disciplining your children? Do you do it in anger and frustration? Is there kindness in your voice with the sternness?
4. In closing prayer, why don't you surrender any unyielding part of your heart to God? What if you confessed the need for him to supercharge you with kindness so you could live it out even at level 2?

¹Spiros Zodhiates et al., eds. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 1482.

²Beth Moore. *Living Beyond Yourself* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press, 2007), 135.

³Larry Kreider and Sam Smucker. *Growing the Fruit of the Spirit* (Lititz, PN: House to House Publications, 2008), 79.

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Chapter 7: Goodness—Love in Action!

We know God wants us to be good...and do good. He promises, *“If you do good things, then you will live forever”* (Psalm 37:27, ERV). Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, *“Test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good. Stay away from every kind of evil”* (NLT).

As a child I remember getting into trouble...Boy! Do I remember! Even as a little guy of 4 or 5 I recall hearing about feeding candy Easter eggs to our dog by the handfuls until she was sick. (I need say no more.) I recall putting our cat into the dryer. (As I recollect, not out of meanness, but just to see if he could walk upright after spinning a bit.) And I remember reaching up to the kitchen counter to discover how much icing you could get off the top of a freshly baked cake with one finger! (Quite a lot actually!)

But then I remember the little talk my mom and I had... she always called discipline “a little talk” as we left a room of folks for my punishment. (She and I trimmed more than one lilac bush together to get a switch. Later mom said, “Switches don’t bruise the child, they make the point, and a little goes a long way.” She was right!)

Most importantly: When the spanking was over, I remember sitting down on the bed beside my mom, with her arm around my shoulder. She kindly, but firmly, would assure me that the *reason* I was punished was not just that I had disobeyed. It was to make a responsible man of me. Often she would say something like, “And I don’t want you to grow up that way. I want you to be a man I can be proud of, someone who is trustworthy and a good man.” (Those comments evoked a desire within me to please her and make Mom proud.)

Mom never did discipline me out of anger or her personal frustration, that I know of. I will never forget hearing the tones of BOTH love *and* determination in her voice. It was punishment with a purpose. Mom was not venting her emotions, taking her tough life out on me. She was doing that *for my sake*. She was disciplining me because she loved me and wanted me to be good.

*If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. **But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.***

God is like that. His purposes are not all his own. He has desires for us too. He longs for us to grow up spiritually so that he can be proud of us. He disciplines with both love and determination. According to Hebrews 12:5-6, *“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son”* (NIV). Later, in verses 10-11 we are assured, *“God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness...[discipline]...produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*

Here we see an intriguing spiritual dynamic. Out of love, God trains or disciplines us, in order that we will be what he wants us to be, in order that we will be good and do good to others. Goodness starts in the heart, so let’s see what the correlation is between God’s love and our goodness as he produces that fruit within us.



THE ROOT OF THE MATTER — *Biblical Foundation*

The disposition of the heart is the “root of goodness” according to Scripture. Luke 6:45 makes this clear: *“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks”* (NKJV). The “root” within us, through which God flows into our world, is a heart of love—God’s love. It is as though all the nourishment—all the joy, the peace, patience, *all* the fruit—comes through our hearts and flows out into the lives of those around us.

Looking more closely at this word in the New Testament, good means there is no defect or imperfection and that there is absolute wholesomeness. The Greek for goodness, *agathosune*, is seldom used. It combines being good and doing good. One writer said, “It means kindness in actual manifestation, virtue equipped for action, a bountiful propensity both to will and do what is good, intrinsic goodness producing generosity, and godlike state or being.”¹

The biblical *foundation* of goodness is a heart of pure love. The Word would confuse and trouble us greatly when we read, *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”* (Matthew 5:48, NIV). That command for perfection would completely frustrate us if it were not for the context. Jesus is talking about love here. In verse 48 the Lord is summarizing his teaching on loving everyone, not just the “good Christian folk.” He is telling us to have complete, fair, and wholehearted love, “perfect love.”

Occasionally someone will say, “We can’t be perfect. God doesn’t really mean we should be.” And they’re right, *if* God meant, “Never make a mistake. Don’t ever miscalculate something. Never make an error in judgment.” But he doesn’t say—or mean—that. He means, love God and others completely or entirely, purely, perfectly. And that kind of love can come only from a heart completely surrendered to the Lord.

Can God purify a heart? Can he enable us to have a pure heart and perfect love. Of course he can! Why else would David pray, *“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me”* (Psalm 51:10, NIV)? Proverbs 22:11 refers to the person *“who loves a pure*

heart and whose speech is gracious” (NIV). (Notice the doing follows the being.) Paul wrote, “The aim of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5, NIV). And how do we get this pure heart? Peter explains, “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22, NIV).

When we obey the truth, we *know* our hearts are pure, and out of them flows pure love. It is lived out in real life, being expressed, first, to God, and then to all those around us...the good, the bad, and the ugly! We are then good to them, to *everyone*. Goodness is love in *action*!

STAYING CONNECTED – *In Spiritual Relationships*



The purpose beneath Jesus’ going to the cross was even more extensive than forgiveness for sins. It was that, without a doubt. But Jesus also said he came that we might have abundant life. Salvation is not only spiritual. It is meant to be lived out in a Christ-like life. Ephesians 2:10 teaches the correlation between what we are, by the grace of God, and what we can *become*. It points out that part of God’s ultimate purpose is, at least, to enable us to do good, by making us good. *“God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us new people so that we would do good things. God had already planned those good things for us. God had planned for us to live our lives doing those good things” (ERV).*

This implies that God’s form of goodness is *being*, not just doing good alone. He wants us to serve, to love, to give. In *order* for us to do what he intends, he must remake us and remold us into his image. That is a matter of being. Then comes the doing. *“God blesses those whose hearts are pure” (Matthew 5:8, NLT).* The blessing follows purity. The Lord has promised to honor those who honor him.

*God has made us
what we are. In
Christ Jesus, God
made us new people
so that we would do
good things.*

There is a great summary of this relationship between being and doing in Psalms 37:3. *“Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness” (NKJV).* With this verse we learn that trusting God is a key to being what he wants us to be. But perhaps the *most* poignant verse of all says, *“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8, NIV).* God expects us to live good lives. Since he has shown us what pure goodness is, in Christ, he intends for his people to be good. Why can he expect that of us? Because he died so we would be purified inside...and act justly outside. That is goodness, a fruit of the Spirit.

BEARING MUCH FRUIT – Application: *Living it out!*



Goodness is the litmus test of God's love within us. When we express goodness, and "overcome evil with good" we know we've caught God's principles in our hearts and are living them out. Goodness is used only some twenty times in the Word. It is used to describe ethical or moral character. Billy Graham's paragraph on goodness is one of the most poignant I have ever read:

The word "good" in the language of Scripture literally means "to be like God," because He alone is the One who is perfectly good. It is one thing, however, to have high ethical standards but quite another for the Holy Spirit to produce the goodness that has its depths in the Godhead. The meaning here is more than just "doing good." Goodness goes far deeper. Goodness is love in action. It carries with it not only the idea of righteousness imputed, but righteousness demonstrated in everyday living by the Holy Spirit. It is doing good out of a good heart, to please God, without expecting medals and rewards. Christ wants this kind of goodness to be the way of life for every Christian."²

In other words, many people do good things. Sinful people may do kind acts, but with a self-serving motive behind them. Even evil people might strive to appear to be doing good in an effort to camouflage their evil intents or purposes. A thief may appear to have a "gift" or "prize" in order to gain entrance into a house. The child molester gives a child candy. The characteristic that proves the difference between true goodness and "good" with ulterior motives is consistency. Finally, only God knows what we are truly like on the inside. Only he can judge our authenticity and decide our destiny.

Living out this goodness is dependent on only one thing – the active work of the Holy Spirit within us producing this virtue in our daily lives, out there on the branches of life. Left to our own efforts and commitment, our goodness goes only so far. We will inevitably be caught off guard by some pressure we face, some hasty decision we make, etc. But when we are surrendered to the Spirit of God, he alone is able to keep us in touch with his plan and enabled with his power. "*For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose*" (Philippians 2:13, KJV).

Once we give God his rightful place to influence us for good, he will act in and through us for his higher purposes. For his will and work to be produced in our lives will require commitment on our part...and obedience. The truth is, "God's goodness is readily available to all of us, but we must be disciplined and keep our focus on him and on who we are in Christ."³

The secret to being a truly good person is in our intimate relationship with the Father. It is amazing how suddenly a branch cut from the tree will wither. We must keep in direct contact with God moment by moment or life immediately drains from our spiritual lives and there is no chance of being fruitful. Life is gone instantly and with it goes any possibility of bearing fruit. When we are severed from our life-source of godly love, so is the action to which God calls us.

One reason some believers are ineffective is that the vital union with God has been allowed to disconnect, rendering us fruitless.

Thinking It Through

1. Let's reflect. Take a moment and jot down the two or three most significant points to you personally in this segment. Review this section and ask the Lord to highlight the issues he brought to your mind and heart as you read it.
2. Now, if any change you need to make on any of those points has come to mind, note them here. Write out any specific steps you need to take...it might be resisting temptation, reestablishing a vital personal relationship with the Lord, or even asking forgiveness for some sin.
3. Do you have a sense that God wants you to be more authentic? Do you have a secret suspicion within your heart that you are not pleasing him at some point? If so, jot it down and pause to pray (talk with God) about it. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9, ASV). Notice, this does **not** say, "some unrighteousness" or even *"a lot of unrighteousness,"* but ***"all unrighteousness."*** This is how we know God wants to deal with all disobedience, regardless of how insignificant it appears. His complete will is to deal with anything that is not righteous.
4. Here are just a few common problems or needs people have that keep them from being good or doing good. Let God speak to you as you look up and read the verses that give us help on these points.
 - Habitual sinning (Psalms 119:9, 11 and 1 Corinthians 10:13)
 - Disobeying God's Word (James 1:22)
 - Sexual sins (James 1:14-15, Romans 12:9)
 - Returning to old sins (2 Corinthians 5:17, Colossians 1:27)
 - Living a godly life around sinful influences (Philippians 2:14-15)

5. Do you need God's help more to "be good" or to "do good"? Is inward sin or outward sin the core of your spiritual need? Regardless of which it is, offer that to God now in prayer. Be willing to humble yourself and to turn from anything God points out to you. Trust his Spirit. Let God make you truly good and allow him to put love into action!

¹Thomas E. Trask & Wayde I. Goodall, *The Fruit of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 104.

²Billy Graham, *The Collected Works of Billy Graham* (New York: Inspirational Press, 1993), 28.

³Ibid, Trask and Goodall, 108.

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Chapter 8: 24/7 Christians

Somewhere lately I read the account of the sports caster who described an NBA player with the term, “24/7.” This saying is an abbreviation which stands for “24 hours a day, 7 days a week,” normally referring to a service or business available all times of the day or night without interruption. According to a BBC report, the first known use of the term is attributed to basketball player Jerry Reynolds, who in 1983 described his jump shot as being “good 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.”¹

That’s not a bad description of the faithfulness God expects of us, is it? Bill Hybels once asked the rhetorical question, “How much is a 95 % commitment to the Lord?” His answer: “Not enough.” God asks for complete commitment. Jesus wants to be absolute lord of our lives, not the lord, relatively speaking. In this expectation, we come to a core value among the fruit, non-negotiable obedience to Christ that is 100%...both in quality and quantity. That is, he wants all of us all the time. There are no “half-way” houses with God.

In Scripture we see this requirement expressed in dozens of ways: Jesus once said that if we love father or mother, brother or sister more than him, we are not worthy of him. In Psalm 101:6 the NKJV states, “*My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me; He who walks in a perfect way, He shall serve me.*” And, perhaps the clearest statement on this concept is in 1 Corinthians 4:2 (NKJV), “*Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.*”

The core value of faithfulness is also a heart quality of love. The Word teaches, “*Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart*” (1 Peter 1:22, NIV). Love is the motivating and mobilizing quality that ignites every person who is empowered and filled with the Holy Spirit. And once this love permeates the heart, it demonstrates itself in obedience. Deuteronomy 13:4 (ERV) teaches, “*You must follow the Lord your God! Respect him. Obey the Lord’s commands, and do what he tells you. Serve the Lord, and never leave him!*” Wow! “Never” leave him! That’s faithfulness. And Jesus challenges us, “*If you love me, keep my commandments*” (John 14:15, NIV).

*Stay away from
the evil things a
young person
wants to do. Try
very hard to live
right and to
have faith, love,
and peace. Do
these things
together with
those people
who have pure
hearts and trust
in the Lord.*

2 Timothy 2:22

What are the biblical and theological foundations upon which this principle is based? How can we come to these conclusions from Scripture? Let's do a bit of word study and review God's faithfulness to discover the answers to those questions, then look to see how they apply to us.

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER -- *Biblical Foundation*



There are two striking 10- to 12-foot Western White Pine trees in our backyard, one on each corner. They are only three years old, but have grown rapidly to give our little yard grace and dignity. A month ago one of them began to droop near the top branches. I thought at first that it might not be getting enough water, so I gave it extra watering times. Sadly, last week it had drooped even more, from the middle of the tree up. Panicked, I made a quick trip to our Home Depot nearby and talked with the horticulturist. I showed her samples of a branch and of some pitch that was oozing on the trunk. We concluded Pine Beetles were the culprits! I got detailed directions for the treatment, part of which was to remove some of the bark around the trunk where there was pitch. Then, the horticulturist gave me a quick warning about removing that bark. "Never peel off more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the bark around the trunk. You will stop the 'phloem' from getting nourishment back into the top of the tree and making it healthy again." I thought what an important lesson that is for us. We want to be healthy and strong. God wants to "flow" through us into the society around us. If the "spiritual bark" of Bible reading, prayer time, or spiritual fellowship is torn away by overcrowded lifestyles, God cannot flow through us.

The Greek word we translate "faithful" is *pistis*. It is used in Galatians and elsewhere. It is also translated, "faith." This difference does not create a problem, however, since there is an obvious connection between faith and being faithful. Faith might be equated to trust, and faithfulness to trustworthiness. A life built on faith will be consistently faithful, 24/7. When we falter at some point of faith, we jeopardize our faithfulness. Faith always moves outward. Faith without works is dead, James wrote. When I truly believe I truly will *be*. Being and doing naturally follow believing (faith).

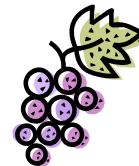
Perhaps it goes without saying by this point in our study that our spotlight verse (on the previous page) contains the focal truth that spiritual goodness of heart is the channel through which spiritual truth flows. And the heart is the vital organ of all the spiritual fruit. "*Do these things together with those people who have pure hearts and trust in the Lord.*" A pure heart is the conduit through which the enabling power of the Holy Spirit will stream. Allow too much of that relationship to be torn away, and God's Spirit cannot flow through us.

Therefore, we need to understand God's goodness as it is the source of ours. Here are a few observations about God's goodness:

- He is faithful in protecting us: "*But the Lord is faithful. He will give you strength and protect you from the Evil One*" (2 Thessalonians 3:3, ERV).

- He is faithful in providing for us: *"But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it"* (1 Corinthians 10:13b, NKJV).
- He is faithful in his promises: *"God's word is true. You can depend on everything he does"* (Psalm 33:4, ERV).
- He is faithful in his plans: *"But the Lord's plans stand firm forever; his intentions can never be shaken"* (Psalm 33:11, NLT).

In other words, God is faithful... **TOTALLY** faithful! That consistency sets the bar for us. If and when we become Christ-like, we behave as he did. Jesus promises to pass on those qualities of spiritual fruit through the Spirit (to be a witness - Acts 1:8 and Mark 13:11, to guide us – John 16:13, to live within us – John 14:17, and to empower us – Luke 1:35 and Acts 1:8). What a list! These verses, and dozens of others like them, reveal that the Spirit of God is a person, that he wants to abide (or dwell) in us, and that God's qualities are (to a lesser or greater extent) reproduced within us! THERE is the secret to being "24/7 Christians"! If it all depended on me to be everything...or even ANYthing...Jesus was, I would fail miserably. But consistent and faithful lives are possible as we submit our hearts, devotion, and lives to God's Spirit to control and manage.



STAYING CONNECTED — *In Spiritual Relationships*

The qualities of faith and trust resulted in true life changes in the followers of Jesus. There are two parts to the story of Jesus' followers: Before the day of Pentecost, the apostles had indicated they would belong to Jesus and follow him. Peter, the most striking example, promised to never betray Jesus. In fact, when the Lord said someone would betray him, they all asked, "Is it I?" or stated, "Surely not me!" That night, and on the lake when he walked on water to Jesus, Peter's desire was clear and his intent was admirable, to be sure. Yet, Peter, and the others, all lacked one thing – the capacity to follow through on what they intended and promised. They *wanted* to do the right thing, but couldn't follow through. They *intended* to be true, but weren't. They *planned* to stand for right, but fell to pressure.

As a result of their partial commitment, they were partially faithful. They were noticeably absent around the cross. After Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus, they hid out in rooms and along the beaches of Galilee. You did not see them making a difference. There was no preaching, no one healing anyone, and no crowds...anywhere!

But, then comes Pentecost! On that day, God's Spirit did *exactly* what Jesus had told them he would. At the Last Supper, the Lord promised, *"He is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who leads into all truth. The world at large cannot receive him, for it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you do, for he lives with you now and some day shall be in you"* (John 14:17, TLB). Read that last part again carefully. Note that Jesus told them that the Spirit was near, but just not within them. Then, at Pentecost the wind of the Spirit filled the room as He filled their souls. What looked like fire lit on their heads as the Spirit purified and ignited their hearts.

The Spirit certainly had been *with* them. Their lives had truly been turned around. They left their businesses, their towns, their homes, and their families to follow him. Some had brought friends or brothers with them. They walked wherever he led them. They saw the miracles, shared the joys, and learned the truths. Truly, *THAT'S* commitment! Yes...but it is not surrender. Faithfully following Jesus means **both** clean hands **and** a pure heart; both a changed life and a cleansed spirit. *"Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded"* (James 4:8, NIV)

But the Spirit was not yet *in* them. Even for these Apostles, he was **with** them. He had impacted their lives. He had worked through them (most of the time). True. He was with them, just not *in* them. They were under his influence, just not yet under his control. For these followers, and for far too many followers today, he is Savior, but not yet Lord. They like to hear the message. They love the excitement of being around Jesus. They enjoy the feelings of being with his crowd. But if you call for something from them, if even *HE* asks for commitment, sadly, life is suddenly too busy. You know how it is...wanting peace, but loving comfort? Fun, but not filled. Happy, though not holy. Thrilled, just not yet transformed.

To be a 24/7 Christian, we must take the intentional step of surrendering our affections completely to him. This is a step many "followers" are not willing to take. For far too many of us, being saved was far more satisfying than we can even imagine being sanctified might be.

The great missionary and preacher E. Stanley Jones faced this dilemma about a year after he accepted Christ. In *A Song of Ascents* Jones wrote of realizing something was missing in his young Christian life. He began to pray, read, and reflect on New Testament teaching. He soon became aware that he had not surrendered his will to God. He had given the Lord his life, his plans, his future...just not the one thing God needed most to empower and ignite him...his will. Jones took a step in faith to pray a prayer of surrender and commitment. He prayed until he knew God had heard. He sensed new peace and an assurance that the Holy Spirit had entered his heart, as well as his life. Jones testified that his will had been cowed or suppressed until that time, that it had been "controlled" by him in an effort to please God, but that it was not yielded until that day.

Paul went to Ephesus and visited among the believers, *"There he found some disciples, and asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.'"* (Acts 19:1-2, NIV). The empowering of God's Spirit was not just a Pentecost event. In numerous places believers prayed and were filled (Acts 8:15, 19). Jesus himself told the Disciples, *"Receive the Holy Spirit"* (John 20:22, NIV). Individuals were filled with the Holy Spirit...Stephen—Acts 7:55, Peter—Acts 4:8, Paul—Acts 9:17, and Barnabas—Acts 11:24. These were ordinary men, most of whom were not among the original Apostles. They were men who committed themselves completely to God and prayed to be supernaturally empowered with his Spirit.

BEARING MUCH FRUIT – Application: *Living It Out!*



As with most truth, this whole idea of surrender, commitment, and faithfulness are more attractive than applicable, far more inspiring to write and read about than to live out. Yet, that is exactly where God wants to take us. The Lord longs to be our Lord, completely. Perhaps that is why, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 was written to believers: *“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.”* Here “sanctify” means two things: “To cleanse or purify,” and “to set aside for another’s unique purposes.” So that is what God wants to do with us, to cleanse or purify our “whole spirit, soul, and body” so he can empower us for *his* exclusive purposes.

Does that strike you like it does me? I look carefully at that promise and naturally respond, “Wow!” That’s *amazing* that God even *wants* to dwell within me *and* that he has also promised to do so! “Wow!” Right? The Word is clear in even what our part is and what God will do too. Romans 12:1-2 explains, *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will”* (NIV). This is the divine exchange: All there is of me for all there is of God.

When it comes to this idea of “living it out,” nothing is more inwardly foundational than this transaction between us and God. We offer ourselves “as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God” and he transforms us. We know he does that transforming part because, in the original language, “be transformed” is a transitive verb, done by someone else to us in this case. Further, it is in the aorist tense, meaning it is action to be completed. At the point of transformation God changes our capacity to follow through on our desires. Romans 8 is an excellent summary of the fact that this divine exchange transforms our thinking, our view of things, and our lifestyle. We become “overcomers”! What a way to live it out!

Thinking It Through

1. If you have not taken the *Fruit of the Spirit Assessment* yet, seriously consider doing so. Especially on a subject such as goodness, gaining a more objective understanding of our relationship with God, and seeing where and how he is working in us, can be remarkably rewarding. If you have taken the Assessment, look at your response under “goodness.” Read the description on the back of the Assessment, and prayerfully jot down anything you believe the Lord may be leading you to change in this area.

2. Which statement in the following list is closest to where you are today regarding this idea of making a total commitment to God so he is your Lord as well as Savior?
 - a. ____ I have not even thought about this inner surrender much.
 - b. ____ I am sure open to this and want to learn more.
 - c. ____ I understand this process well enough to start praying that God will transform me.
 - d. ____ I have struggled with total commitment for years. It is time I surrender!
 - e. ____ I made a complete commitment to God and asked him to fill me with the Holy Spirit.
 - f. ____ I made a total commitment to the Lord some time ago, and now want to live it out more.
3. If anything did not make sense to you in the section above titled, “STAYING CONNECTED – *In Spiritual Relationships*” look up any verses there or any Scripture you can find on the subject. Jot down anything new in your understanding. Also mark down anything God brings to your mind about your next steps in the spiritual path you are on.

¹"Where does 24/7 come from?" BBC News. 25 July 2007. Retrieved on 2009-05-04.

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Chapter 9: “Gentle As You Go”

My wife, Kathy, serves as a naturalist for a cruise line in Alaska in the summer. She was raised there and has written three books about the state and her own life growing up in this remarkable state. She makes four or five presentations each week in the ship’s theater about life in the state, about the Gold Rush of ’98, about whales, glaciers, and the like.

One of her responsibilities on board is to work on the bridge providing narration for passengers about the land, the glaciers, and wild life. I have gone to this command center of the ship scores of times while on vacations with her there. We have now been on 20 cruises together, and, no, it never gets tiring or old. There’s always some natural development in glacial configuration, wild life where we didn’t expect to see it, some adventure waiting to be discovered around the corner.

On the ship’s bridge I am intrigued endlessly about the systems of route plotting, navigation, passenger services, engineering, and all that emanates from this nerve center of the ship. Orders to change direction, to alter speed, to activate stabilizers, and on and on are briskly repeated and meticulously followed in an instant. As the ship navigates through majestic fjords, and weaves its way through icebergs as big as your house, the series of commands is endless.

One of these commands is, “Gently as you go.” It is more subjective and general than most of the orders to, “Alter course to 310.5 degrees” or “Decrease to 5 knots.” Those are precise, clear, and easily measured. But this, “Gently as you go” leaves some room for discretion and judgment calls. One might loosely paraphrase that it means, “Watch carefully and be sure you cautiously avoid the treacherous icebergs. Treat them with utmost respect.” It’s like the similar command, “Steady as you go.” That one means, “Stay on your course and maintain our current speed.”

But this “gently as you go” puts some responsibility on the one at the controls. It means to be vigilant about your surroundings and to relate to them with reverence. That’s a lot like gentleness in personal relationships. Jesus would have us treat others with utmost respect and even esteem them *above* ourselves. The Lord’s way is to give everyone honor, to carefully and thoughtfully relate to them, and to do that transfers much of the responsibility into our hands.

We were not looking for praise from you or any other people. We are apostles of Christ. And so when we were with you, we could have used our authority to make you do things. But we were very gentle with you. We were like a mother caring for her little children.”

1 Thessalonians 2:6-7 (ERV)

It's like the "key verse" at the beginning of this chapter: We are not taught to be commanding, one might say, "using our authority to make you do things." Rather we are given the picture of a mother who lovingly cares for a young child. This fruit of the Spirit is akin to kindness we discussed earlier. The Greek word actually comes from the same root as meekness. It is gracious and respectful. It is not demanding or controlling. Like many virtues of Christian holiness, gentleness gains respect as it is given respectfully. And, like all virtues, gentleness is developed when we appropriate the Spirit's work in our lives.

So, let's see what the core biblical teaching about this relational fruit of the Spirit is. Then we'll discover how the root of gentleness branches out into our lives and personal interaction. Welcome to the journey!

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER — *Biblical Foundation*



American Christianity today is in danger of succumbing to the postmodern ideal of individual truth and relativism. With that is the prominent concept in secular culture that to get anything done you must have power, wealth, and/or prestige. Far too often young men in our society are taught that to be a "real man" you must flaunt your masculinity and flex your muscles. Similarly, as more women move into the work place they conclude that the only way they can "get ahead" is to join the cutthroat mentality and do that which is best for them, no matter the means or the cost. Further, sports have been getting increasingly brutal with the "X-Games," arena boxing, and gladiator sports. This brutalization of sports, by the way, is one of the 10 distinctive characteristics of the fall of the Roman Empire.

There are striking similarities when we compare our setting with that of Jesus' day. Like us, believers were increasingly told what they could and could not do. Progressively more heavy tax burdens settled on their shoulders, as on ours. Corruption, greed, immorality, and vice had wormed its way into the lives of government officials...and even the lives of religious leaders.

Certainly television and the movies today are not reliable sources from which to gather an understanding of gentleness. There, people are increasingly cussing out, screaming at, and threatening others in their homes or work places. For many of the writers and directors, one could conclude, gentleness is akin to weakness, and strong people are direct, abrasive, in charge, and powerful.

However, the Lord dramatically displayed a grace that was truly counter-cultural. His life cut cross-grain against the flow of power-hungry lords and against those who used their increasing power over others and for their own selfish gain. One of my favorite authors, Philip D. Kenneson, states this example of gentleness eloquently:

When we look for Jesus to take the world by storm, to win over those who have power, influence and prestige in order to advance his kingdom more efficiently, we find instead an itinerant preacher and healer who spends much of his time with the weak and outcast of society: children, lepers, prostitutes, and tax-collectors. When we see Jesus rejected by the

Samaritans, we look for him to do what his disciples wanted done – to rain down fire upon them—but instead he rebukes *us*. When we look for the conquering hero to make his move, to enter into the royal city on his white charger to signal to the people that the time has come to establish his kingdom, we find instead a Jesus who enters into Jerusalem astride a humble donkey.¹

The Lord teaches—and demonstrates—a responsible and godly concept of gentleness. He said, “*Come to me...for I am gentle*” (Matthew 11:28-29, NIV). The word for gentle is *praos*. It is translated into three different words in English. In some places, like Matthew 5:5, it is “meek,” in others such as Titus 3:2 it is “humility,” and in places like Galatians 5:23 it is “gentleness.” Though different words, one can easily see how they are interrelated, all bearing the marks of kindness, grace, and love. One interesting side bar: This word was often used by the Greeks referring to a wild animal, such as a horse, that had been tamed, and therefore, became a useful servant. In all, not a bad description of what we want the Spirit to do for and in us!

In the section, “Bearing Much Fruit—Application: Living it Out” we’ll see at least three ways gentleness is intended to be lived out. Those all begin with the biblical foundation. In the Word, gentleness is foundational to our relationships. We can easily discover our “gentleness quotient” by looking honestly at how we respond or react to those around us who are abrasive or controlling or pushy. What we feel, how we react, and what we do with such a person all show us where we stand with gentleness. It’s one thing to agree that “a gentle answer turns away wrath,” but quite another to respond in real life with grace and a gentle word.

James gives us an excellent summary of gentleness, both of heart and life when he teaches that heavenly wisdom, “*is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere*” (James 3:17). Wow! Try living that out all by yourself day to day with every person you meet! Most of us would conclude, “That can’t be done!” We’d throw up our hands in despair with the conclusion that this standard is too hard to live out!

But that is where the Holy Spirit comes in! He alone can enable us to have the capacity to live this one out. He promises that his grace is sufficient for us. If we feel overwhelmed at how difficult it is to be consistently gentle with others, he promises that his strength is made *perfect* when we are weak! Next, we’ll look at the relationship between our inner and outer lives. We’ll see biblically that there is a co-relationship between what we are and what we say and do. We want to learn what it means to live “gently as you go.”

STAYING CONNECTED — *In Spiritual Relationships*



When we have talked about “Staying Connected,” I am sure you are clear that this connection is between our hearts and our lives. There is a vital and interlocked relationship between what we believe and how we live out our faith. I have often said it this way: The farther I drift from God, the harder I am on others and the easier I am with myself. But the

closer I get to God, the harder I am on myself and the easier I am on others. Like me, if you find yourself holding up a high standard for others to live up to, while excusing your own critical attitude or resentful spirit, look first to how close you are to the Father. Maybe someone has moved, and it sure isn't Him!

So exactly how can we stay connected, keeping our lives in alignment with the Holy Spirit? That task has been called, "walking in the light," living "in the stream of the Spirit," living "the Spirit-controlled life," to name a few. But they all refer to the same dynamic: The work of consistently submitting mind, emotion, and will to God...and it is *work*. Jesus invites us to "*Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls*" (Matthew 11:29). As he said, this staying connected is *work*...serious work. When the Lord refers to "my yoke" we get a picture that we are working alongside him.

Being "yokefellows with Christ" has two implications:

One, we must learn to go the same direction as Christ. That is what he means when the Lord says, "and learn of me." Discover what God wants done, the way he wants you to live, how he wants you to relate to others. Then go that direction with him. Decide in your heart that his ways are the best, regardless of what it looks like to you.

Two, we are both sharing the load. But, the remarkable thing is, when we get in the yoke with Jesus, like a suzerainty covenant,² our best is only a very small part of the load! He carries it all in reality. The old song says, "Jesus paid it all. All to him I owe. Sin had left its crimson stain. He washed it white as snow."

The way God leads us, teaches us, and feeds us is gently. To give us a clear picture of our relationship with the Father, Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd. This portrays him as a loving caregiver; one who leads the sheep. You can drive cattle in a herd, but you can only lead sheep in a flock. That is the connection we have with God. The path is narrow at times. His road for us is often not the path we would choose, but the Shepherd knows best. He may even break the leg of a wild lamb that always strays off into danger exercising its own will. But, then he lovingly binds up the leg. He gently carries that lamb on his own shoulders for weeks while the leg heals. And in that process, with the lamb always in the care of the shepherd, always mindful of his love, there is an inextricable and irreversible bond that blossoms between that lamb and the shepherd that will never be broken. Remarkable, isn't it!

BEARING MUCH FRUIT — Application: *Living It Out!*



There is a triplet application to living out this gentleness. Scripture is replete with explanations and directives about these three dimensions of the gentleness the Spirit produces in us. In them, we see the natural progression from Jesus, through leaders, pastors, and teachers, into the world through witnessing and instruction. Here is a summary of these three proportions of this grace of gentleness:

Second, God expects us, as pastors, leaders, teachers, parents, to lead with the same gentle spirit as evidenced in him. His instructions are very clear at this point: “*Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near*” (Philippians 4:5, NIV). Jesus wants us to stay away from anything that might trip us up. He urges us to lead with grace and diligently practice gentleness along with the other fruits: “*But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, [and] gentleness*” (1 Timothy 6:11, NKJV).

Thinking It Through

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- 52

3. Do you think of a certain person in your life when you read about being gentle? Was it a teacher, a parent, some older more mature believer? What were the evidences of gentleness in their lives? Was that an attractive characteristic? Why do you believe that particular person came to mind?

4. In your own daily walk with the Lord, in exactly what ways (or with which people) do you need to concentrate on being gentle? How would you like the Lord to empower you and equip you to be more gentle in working with others, raising your children, etc.?

5. In a quiet moment of prayer, reflect on what you have read, and some of the conclusions you have drawn. Jot down any impressions God gives you. Even make a two- or three-item list of specific ways in which, or particular people with whom, you want to be more gentle. Read your list to God and offer them to Him to help you.

¹Philip D. Kenneson, *Life on the Vine, Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in Christian Community* (Downers Grove, Ill: Inter Varsity Press 1999), 205-206.

²A suzerainty covenant is an agreement between a strong party and a weak party, where the strong party agrees to protect the weaker party if the weaker party keeps certain rules.

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Chapter 10: Self-Control– Running to Win!

Nothing is more moving than seeing a runner literally give everything he or she has to cross the finish line in first place. They are totally spent physically and exhilarated emotionally at the same time when the race is over. I have been moved to tears more than once seeing a gold medal winner stand tall on the platform as his/her national anthem is played at the Olympics.

The race may be run on the track, but it is won in the silent early morning hours when the runner was up before anyone else to work out. Every race is won by carefully watching the diet, by getting rest, and by running...endlessly running. Running and winning may be inspirational events, but they are won with determination and perspiration.

As believers, we are taught to discipline ourselves as well. Paul asks us readers, *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever”* (1 Corinthians 9:24-25, NIV). You and I are supposed to be in strict training. God expects us to run to win. That implies that we must be disciplined. We need to relentlessly give attention to what we take in spiritually, what we think, how we respond to challenges, where we go, and what we do.

A primary element to out this disciplined life is self-control. One writer stated, “Self-control is the answer to the question, ‘How do we keep from yielding to the acts of the sinful nature?’”¹ Galatians 5:19 makes it clear what these acts of the sinful nature are: *“...sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*

Like so many, you may not have any struggle against what appear to be the more gross sins...witchcraft, fits of rage, orgies, etc. But what about the idols of possessions or discord or selfish ambition? Those are in the same list. Can any of us honestly say that

Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.

**1 Peter 1:13-15
(NIV)**

we never succumb to anything on this list? They are all important, or they would not be there. Just as with the more severe sins, sheer self control is needed to stand against these that seem less severe. And in the end, only the Holy Spirit can empower us to withstand temptation (read 1 Corinthians 10:13).

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER — *Biblical Foundation*



Self-control is the cardinal rule of character. Whether defensive action, resisting the temptations stated above, or more offensively committing to live out our lives for God, self-control is the primary principle that gives us follow-through. Without it any harmful habit or behavior can control, and eventually destroy, any of us. *“Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control”* (Proverbs 25:28). The Greek word for self-control literally means “self-mastery.” Our objective as believers, therefore, is to conduct our lives in such a way that we remove any influence, habit, or encumbrance that would keep us from serving and pleasing God.

The root of the matter in the area of self-control is that discipline is the product of God’s Spirit active within us. Titus 2:11 says, *“For the grace of God that brings salvation...teaches us to live self-controlled.”* Similarly, 2 Timothy 1:7 teaches us, *“God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline.”* In fact, the connection between these last two (love and self-discipline) is an interesting one. For one thing, the Fruit of the Spirit begins with love, and now ends with self-control. For another, you cannot love without being self-controlled in some ways. And similarly, you can’t be self-controlled without some form of love... for our selves, for others, or for God. Among the qualities God promises to give us in 2 Timothy 1:7 is, *“love and...self-discipline.”*

Perhaps the truth that self-control is so central and primary to authentic Christian life accounts for the fact that many people run away from it. To them the idea of self-discipline is a hindrance. With that objection they reveal for whom they are living. If one is living for God, then getting rid of unhealthy habits, ungodly attitudes, and any form of sin, will free them to serve the Lord wholeheartedly. So, they strive to live pure or holy lives with joy, “as unto the Lord.”

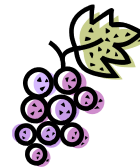
On quite the opposite side of the proverbial coin is the notion that following those rules or requirements of godly law will keep people from doing what they want. Obedience, morality, ethics, are all in their way of serving themselves. They suppose that they are “liberated” when they cast off the restraints of morality and decency. Sadly, this only serves to leave them immoral and indecent. Further, when people throw off restraints they commonly find themselves enslaved to the very habits or practices they thought would free them. Morgan Phelps Noyes stated this wisely: “No man is the master of his fate so long as he lives in a universe which he did not create, and no man is the captain of his soul so long as there are within him dark forces which need to be redeemed.”²

To most people today it is unreasonable to think freedom comes from self-control. Those two ideas appear to be contradictions of each other. While the truth is that self-control and discipline prove we are truly free from the things we resist. One writer put it this way: “Unfree men are horrified by the suggestion of accepting daily discipline. Confusing inner control with external tyranny, they prefer caprice to self-restraint. They would rather have ideals than norms, hopes than directions, faith than forms. But the goal and the way cannot long endure in separation.”³

When we set out to win we necessarily commit to daily discipline. Self-service becomes minimized, and the biblical concept of devotion primarily to God in everything must become a way of believing and living. In our key verse at the beginning of this chapter our hope is rooted in the grace given us at redemption. As discussed earlier, all too often the grace of God is thought only to be capable of saving us. I contend that God’s grace can also purify our hearts and minds. Why else would the Word teach us to cleanse our hands (be forgiven for sins) and purify our hearts (addressed to the double minded half-way believers) in James 4:8? If God’s grace cannot completely change us, why else would Romans 12:1-2 instruct us to “*present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice*” and “*be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds*”?

God’s standard is high, but his grace is greater. In the New Testament, Bishops and Elders are required to be blameless. They must live pleasing to God and must be able to control themselves (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7-8). Without the grace of God flowing through our hearts it would not be humanly possible to live out these requirements. But *with* God’s Spirit in charge of our inner lives, the outer lives (self-control and discipline) are not much of a battle for us to win. Kreider and Smucker put it well when they explain that this is “the grace God gives to believers to give them the ‘desire and the power to do God’s will’.”⁴

STAYING CONNECTED — *In Spiritual Relationships*



God’s plan for staying connected is grounded in relationship with him. For one thing, his empowering work begins with Jesus. “*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of ... Jesus Christ*” (Titus 2:11-13, NIV). One writer said, “Grace not only redeems us, it reforms us.”

God not only saves us from sins, his grace is so remarkable as to cleanse us from sinfulness! I LOVE that about God. He not only asks us to do what seems to be the impossible, he grants us the capacity to do it! We see that lived out throughout the Bible.

God told Abraham to follow him, then gave him the courage to do so. He told Moses to lead the Hebrews out of slavery, then gave him an empowered rod, a mouth piece in Aaron, and miracle-working power to accomplish the task. God tested Abraham with the command to sacrifice his son, then provides the sacrifice for the sacrifice. The Lord asked even resistant Jonah to go to Nineveh and prepared a mode of transportation. Think of it! Whether it’s

building an ark, being absolutely true under pressure like Joseph, or whatever God is asking YOU to do for him now, he will provide a way!

Next comes the test: Will we choose to surrender ourselves entirely to him so he can cleanse us and make us completely holy? We have his word that he *wants* to, you know. This is his plan for believers: *“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, NIV). Notice, the promise is not to sanctify us (i.e., to make us pure or holy, perfectly fit for his use) “for the most part.” God’s plan is not to cleanse us “except for some things we can’t change.” According to the Word, God will make you entirely, completely, or thoroughly holy (purified and set aside for his purposes) *PERIOD!* Take God’s Word for it! He, therefore, includes heart purity. The Lord gives us such grace that we serve him completely, thus giving us the capacity to say, “no” from the heart when we should. And THAT is self-control! (I love that, don’t you?) If we fail to believe this, our lack of faith, not his grace, fails us.

Back to our runners intending to win: When the runner begins training he/she must say, “no” to other good and fun things, for the time, energy, and focus needed for daily discipline. They tell me Olympic swimmers and runners practice on average 6 to 8 hours a day! To me that is phenomenal. I cannot imagine a life so dedicated to one task...that is, other than the life devoted to Jesus. He is clearly deserving of our love and devotion.

This brings us to the other part of running, the goal and how we finish the race. Whether the broader goal is to be the best, the fastest, the longest runner, etc. the *goal* is ultimately THE important thing. Then, once in the actual race itself, the goal is everything. Runners must start right. They cannot jump the gun. A false start will kill you. It is also extremely vital that runners keep their eyes on the goal and that they run through the tape. If they do not do those two things, they might let up at a crucial moment when their “enemy” sneaks up on them and defeats them.

This is precisely what we must do. Keep our eyes on the goal and run through the tape. The goal represents our vision. (Proverbs 29:18) You can be SURE you have an adversary. He wants to do you in. He intends to embarrass you, and will beat you into the ground if he can. But, praise God: *“Greater is he that is within you, than he that is in the world”* (1 John 4:4, ASV).

BEARING MUCH FRUIT — *Application: Living It Out!*



We need self-control for literally everything in our lives. Again, Kreider and Smucker wrote, “You need self-control to control your words, your food intake, your shopping, your spending, your thoughts, your physical desires, and the list goes on.”⁵ Those are all good desires in their proper place: to eat, to buy clothes, to desire companionship. But it is when those desires begin to control us that we fail to follow God’s directions and move outside his will.

To live this all out: We must start well (be filled with the Holy Spirit surrendered to his will), we must run well (living in the “stream of the Spirit” allowing him to guide us each step), and

we must finish well (keeping our eyes on the goal and running through the tape). In other words...

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever” (1 Corinthians 9:24-25, NIV).

This way of living is not only a wonderful philosophy of life, it must become our mantra as we set out to, “run with patience the particular race God has set before us.” Self-control is running to win!

Thinking It Through

1. Have you ever run a race (of any kind) that required everything you had to win? What went into preparation for that contest? If you disciplined yourself daily for the race, what did you have to give up?
2. How is the race above compare to being a victorious believer? What do you have to commit to? What may you need to give up?
3. In the section, “Staying Connected” we discussed God’s provisions for us that enable us to do for him what would be otherwise impossible. Are you facing anything in your life now that you need God’s supernatural blessing to accomplish? If so, what is it, and what do you need the Lord to provide for you?
4. When it comes to self-control, the theme of this study, where are some of your most difficult battles? We all face them, but they are different for everyone. Someone might have a problem attitude, another may have a controlling habit, still another may gossip or entertain an unhealthy thought life. What are your struggles?
5. As you pray about the temptations or struggles you face, exactly what is it you cannot do for yourself? At what points do you need to ask God to provide for you? After you list a couple,

surrender each area to the Lord. Decide to allow God to provide answers and the victory in any way he chooses. That's running to win!

¹Thomas E. Trask and Wayde I Goodall, *The Fruit of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2000), 153.

²Morgan Phelps Noyes, *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 11 (New York: Abingdon, 1955), 537.

³Abraham Herschel, quoted by Bob Benson Sr. and Michael W. Benson, *Disciplines for the Inner Life* (Nashville: Nelson, 1989), 163.

⁴Larry Kreider and Sam Smucker *Growing the Fruit of the Spirit* (Lititz, Pennsylvania: House to House Publications, 2008) 130.

⁵ *Ibid.* 124.

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Leader's Notes

This review of the fruit of the Spirit is written with two purposes in mind. The written study guide may be used with the CD to strengthen your understanding in preparation for leading a small group in a 10-week study. As an individual study, the material can be used either in part or as a whole to assist in learning and applying all the Spirit provides for us to produce much fruit.

First, these “Leader’s Notes” offer extended study and inspiration for an individual wanting to live a more vital life under the Holy Spirit’s guidance. You can study the cluster of fruit as a whole, or concentrate on any one or a few fruits to grow in grace and knowledge. You can use these readings and Scripture to expand your understanding.

Second, small groups may use this as a 10-week study helping one another grow and move on to spiritual maturity in any number of the spiritual fruits. In this case, the Leader’s Notes section is designed to provide the small group shepherd/leader with a handy resource to use in guiding the group. The leader will save valuable time by simply reading the notes for a given “Fruit” and using the material to help their group understand and apply the Word.

Third, each person can use the *Fruit of the Spirit Assessment* to become more objective in evaluating truly how the Spirit has been producing fruit within them. This is a wonderful tool to help you and your group members identify exactly where you/they may need further development from the Lord. You may want to obtain a *Fruit of the Spirit Assessment* for each group member before the group starts or contact the group members early to recommend that they purchase this inexpensive evaluation tool. The *Fruit of the Spirit Assessment* will be referred to many times throughout the study.

In either case, the CD will add broader understanding and ideas for application of truth to the written study guide. There is no duplicated material between the CD and the written study, though the discussion covers the same nine Fruits of the Spirit, in the same biblical order.

Thank you for using this material to deepen your understanding and to help you apply God’s Word to your life. At the end of these notes is a bibliography of other current books and study guides you can use to go even deeper in your spiritual walk living out the Fruit of the Spirit. May God truly bless and inspire you in this walk!

*Give to other people,
and you will receive.
You will be given
much. It will be
poured into your
hands – more than
you can hold. You
will be given so much
that it will spill into
your lap. The way
you give to other
people is the way
God will give to you.
Luke 6:38 (ERV)*

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Lesson 1: By Way of Introduction

In this first week, our primary objective is to insure that our group members are completely comfortable with each other and have started exploring the Fruit of the Spirit in their lives. If members of your group are new to one another (or if there are a few who have just joined your group that has been together for some time) these exercises will be *especially* valuable.

It is very important that your group take the *Fruit of the Spirit Assessment* early on. They will get the most out of this study if they all have it and take the survey *BEFORE* coming the first week. A good second-best approach is to hand out the assessment at your first small group meeting and either have members complete it then (time permitting) or bring their completed *Fruit of the Spirit Assessment* back the second week.

NOTE: As the facilitator, you will need to give time for each sharing experience and tell them how much time they will have for each experience. It will also help if you are prepared to share what your response might be before they begin; for example, in the “Three Places” experience, share those locations in your own life first. This gives members a chance to think about their own answers. Here are a few experiences to help them begin.

Getting better acquainted:

Ask all the members in your group to get into groups of two with one person they do not know. (In many cases, this will be with those whom they know *the least*.) Have them share their names, something about their family or work, and one interesting thing about their childhood.

Let me introduce my friend:

Staying with their “new friend” have each couple connect with another couple. (You may want to have one of the groups split up—if you have an uneven number of couples). Ask each of them introduce their new friend to the other new couple, sharing one great thing they noticed about their new friend.

Three places in my life:

Staying together with the group of 4, going around the circle of 4, each one shares 3 places in their lives: 1) Where they were born, 2) Where they went on their favorite vacation, and 3) where God became real to them for the first time.

Prayer together is always essential.

As a facilitator, before the group begins you can invite someone to pray at or near the beginning. If no one volunteers, you should begin the prayer.

Ask someone to read the first paragraph aloud as everyone follows along in the study guide.

Share the story of Dave and his teen, Jerry, drawing out how the Holy Spirit opened up that chance to witness in His time, and emphasizing that God wants to work through us, but in His time and His way.

For discussion:

Ask your group to discuss what drew them to this study of the Fruit of the Spirit. What are they hoping to gain by being in the group? Are there any *specific ways* they need to “grow in grace and knowledge” as far as the spiritual fruit is concerned?

Have someone read Acts 4:31 and another read Hebrews 12:14, and still another read Ephesians 6:18. Talk about what these verses have in common. What role did the Holy Spirit have in each of these verses or events? What are the implications for us here today?

Discuss the two items under “Two Clarifications” in Session 1. Help everyone see that “Fruit” (collective) is used because these are not optional blessings we select, but rather God’s way of producing balanced qualities and character in us.

Close with a brief discussion of what the title of this study means, “Bearing Spiritual Fruit In the Power of the Spirit.” Read Galatians 5:22-23. Guide your group to see that without the Holy Spirit in control of our lives, we will never see the Fruit of the Spirit as God wants to. We may strive longer, work harder, try again, all of the above, but without the blessing and empowering of the Holy Spirit, we will always be lacking.

Ideally, provide *Fruit of the Spirit Assessments* for every group member. Take yours well before the group gets together. Use your discoveries as an excellent example of how God might probe their hearts to move ahead spiritually. Report discoveries you made, or confirmations of the way the Holy Spirit has produced certain fruits in you. This is also an excellent time to invite the group to commit to spiritual growth!

Close by asking what the needs are in the lives of your group members. Pray earnestly for each other. Be ready to pray *especially* for the one who might be discouraged, alone, hurt, or struggling.

Remind everyone to complete the *Fruit of the Spirit Assessment* (if not done in group meeting) and bring it back with them next week. Let them know this can be a remarkable journey of discovery and growth!

Reminder: As a group begins a study, or for groups that are not used to homework, it normally requires a reminder some time during the week. You might ask a couple of the more consistent members of the group to help you contact everyone halfway through the week and remind them to bring the *Fruit of the Spirit Assessment* to the next meeting.

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

Galatians 5:22-23
(NIV)

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Lesson 2: Pass It On

Before we begin, if someone in your group plays the guitar or piano, see if you can find the words and music to the old chorus, "Pass it On" by Ralph Carmichael. It is mentioned in this study and would be a fun song to begin and end with.

To get started, do a couple fun things to help everyone relax and get to know each other better. If your group is 9 or more, start with having members get into subgroups of 3 or 4. Once there, ask each group to share one interesting or difficult thing that has happened in their life this week. Give the groups about 15 minutes (4-5 minutes each person). Let them know they may certainly pray if they feel prompted to by the Lord as others share.

Stay in the sub-groups and have fun with the Frog game. Here's how it goes: Sitting around a circle, each person says one thing. The first says "one frog," the next says, "two eyes" (because one frog has two eyes), the next says "four legs," the next says "in the pond" and the next **TWO** PEOPLE each say, "ker-plunk" (one for the front legs and another for the back legs). Then you continue around the group with two frogs and double everything, the next says, "four eyes" (because two frogs have four eyes), then, "8 legs," "in the pond two times, and one "ker-plunk" for each frog by TWO players. Go up to 3 frogs. If they miss they have to go back to the beginning of that number frogs. The object of the game is to see which subgroup is fastest!

Bring everyone back together for sharing time. Start with prayer for the evening.

Ask someone to read the first three paragraphs of lesson two. Discuss: What is the meaning of God's love contrasted with other types of love? Can some loves be possessive? Can others be protective? Is "eros" love healthy? What is wonderful, yet difficult about "agape" love?

Read the story about David Wilkerson (and the young girl who learned about love). Then ask, "Have any of you had to learn some tough lessons about loving? If so, what were they?" You might start with one from your own experience to give members time to reflect.

First John 3:10 and Matthew 7:16 both indicate it is okay to know the tree by its fruit. Do you agree? What's the difference between "by their fruit you will know them" and judging, which we are taught not to do?

What is our part in staying connected (or abiding in) the vine if we are the branches? Exactly what does doing that mean for us in daily life?

In response to the questions in the third paragraph from the end, about what our personal struggles are in expressing God's love. Include discussion about how God's love (1 Corinthians 13:4-8) behaves and functions. What is the single most difficult expression of godly love for you personally? How can we pray with you to improve?

Close by asking members how the group can pray for them this week. Would they would appreciate being held accountable for anything specific?

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Lesson 3: If You Want Joy

One way of starting the group is by singing the chorus, “If you want joy, let Jesus come into your heart.” Then ask for a volunteer to lead the group in prayer that God will teach us and produce joy in our lives in a fresh new way.

Ask, “What Christmas do you remember the best? Was there one gift that stands out in your memory that gave you the most joy? What about receiving that gift gave you enjoyment?”

Discuss the difference between being happy and having joy. Listen for something like, “Happiness is temporary and is based on what is happening at that time, while joy is a condition, a disposition of the heart that exists based on higher values, purposes, etc.”

Before the group meets, ask someone to read the first paragraph under “The Root of the Matter.” Open discussion by asking, what is a time in your life that you felt true joy by putting someone’s needs before your own? (To give them time to think, be prepared to share an incident of your own that gave you joy.)

Read Philippians 4:4-7 and ask, “Exactly how can we ‘rejoice in the Lord always?’ Is that really possible?”

Review where your group members are in the Fruit of the Spirit Assessment on the subject of **joy**. Ask if they rated as high or higher than they had hoped? Have the group discuss what some of them want to do to open their hearts more to the Holy Spirit’s work more so He can produce joy.

Spend a few minutes reviewing the change in the disciples on the Day of Pentecost and the evidence that the Spirit produced authentic joy in them later as they faced all kinds of trials and tests.

Close by asking members to share exactly what they want God to do taking them even deeper into a vital relationship with Him. Depending on how well your group members know each other, you might even ask for a volunteer to pray for each one about their “next step” going deeper.

Close in prayer together.

At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure!”

Luke 10:21

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Lesson 4: Peace Like a River

One good way to start your group is to sing a little chorus many people already know. One suggestion is “Peace Like a River,” and another is “I’ve Got a River of Life Flowing Out of Me.” If yours is an older group they will like, “Peace, Peace, Wonderful Peace...coming down from the Father above. Sweep over my spirit forever, I pray, with fathomless billows of love.”

This week, visit BEFORE the group begins, recruit a group member to pray and let them know the topic of the week’s discussion. Have them ask the group to state anything that has taken peace out of their lives this week. Mention that we’ll pray more about the deeper concerns later, but let people list anything that has unnerved them or troubled them this week.

Start by having someone read the story of the storm, of the disciples’ fear, and waking Jesus in a panic (Matthew 8). Talk about how your group members might have felt: Go around the circle and ask, What would you say?

- ☐ “I’m scared stiff!”
- ☐ “No problem. Jesus is in the boat”
- ☐ “I’m trying to trust,”
- ☐ “I feel so guilty because I’m afraid of the storm.”

(NOTE: Leaders: *their responses* will give you insight into how your members might be feeling about life, or about storms when they come.)

Open discussion by having the group discuss where they rated on **Peace** in the *Fruit of the Spirit Assessment*. You might have some fun with it and ask those who rated high to tell us what is the secret of their success.

Discuss which of the five steps (from the Phil. 4:6-7 section) disrupts their peace. For example, some might say, “No question about it. It’s #1. I worry!” Others may say they don’t turn it over to God when they, “Tell God what they need.”

For this session’s ending prayer, pray conversationally: Someone begins to pray out loud. Use first person personal pronouns of I, me, myself, etc. As someone else is praying, if God moves your heart, follow him or her with a prayer of agreement for that person. Everyone can pray more than once. When no one is praying, listen to the Lord. If he brings something to your mind, pray aloud about that.

“Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. He’s always thinking about you.”

1 Peter 5:7

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Lesson 5: Fast-Track Patience

If your small group is larger (12 or more), break into subgroups of 3 or 4. Then tell them we're going to just have some fun. Since this lesson is titled, "Fast-Track Patience," tell them we're going to have a race. They will be using sounds, not literally running around the room or their group. Race #1 is the Go-Carts: The sound, "put-put-put," is passed from one person to the other around each subgroup. (NOTE: If you have an uneven number of people in the groups (i.e. 4 people in some and 3 in others), have the groups of 4 go around 3 times, and the groups of 3 pass the sound around 4 times so it is even.) Give them a "1 – 2 – 3 – GO!" to get started. Second race: Pass the sound of motorcycles around their circles, "Zooommmm..." Third race: Pass the Indy 500 car sounds around, "RRooooorrrrr..." (Consider giving a prize to the two out of three races winner.)

As we wade into these deeper levels of spiritual fruitfulness, prayer will become increasingly important. Be sure your group moves away from trite sometimes superficial prayers about an uncle's broken ankle, the economy, or "sister so-and-so's job." What if you helped your group become more authentic and personal in prayer?

One wonderful way to do that is with conversational prayer (introduced in last week's leader's guidelines). You may need to restate how this is done because many people know only one way to pray in a group. List the prayers. And pray the list. Take your group to the next level. Challenge them to ask one honest request about themselves spiritually. Tell them you know it will be scary. Let them know you may be having a hard time doing that, but be the leader! Pray that God will allow you to be vulnerable and open in your prayer first.

Remind your group of Paul's victory from 2 Timothy 4:7, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."* Discuss that our dream is to be able to finish with that kind of victory! To that end, encourage them to consider focusing on the problem of impatience.

Ask, "What circumstance causes you to be impatient?" To give them time to think and show them an example of what you're asking for, tell them the situation that makes *you* impatient. Then talk about who is present when you become impatient: Is it in the grocery line? How about at the job? On the highway on the way to work? At the office/school/store where you work? With whom exactly are you impatient?

Discuss: Do these things cause us to be impatient, or are we that way and the circumstances just reveal what we're feeling inside? Can someone else "make you impatient"? If so, does that mean they have that kind of control over you?

Identify a couple items from the lesson to explain to the group. Have members read two of the verses you want them to discuss. Then, close with prayer for each other in what has been shared.

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Lesson 6: Level 2 Kindness

Before the group begins, ask a person if they will open with prayer today, and have them do so as you begin.

A fun little exercise is to come with a fairly large cutout of a gingerbread man, preferably from brown paper. Passing him around your circle, tell each group member to say one unkind thing to him and tear off part of him... maybe a leg, a hand, or foot. They hold the part they tore off. Then, putting the pieces in the middle, provide some masking or scotch tape and “put him back together” with the tape. Ask, “Was it easier to be unkind or to put him back together again?” Is that true in life? Discuss, how did you feel as he went around the group? Ask for any other observations the group may have. (This may develop into quite a discussion about how we treat other people. If so, let that happen.)

Next, if your group took the *Fruit of the Spirit Assessment*, this is an excellent time to report how members did in this area of kindness: Did their kindness “level” come out as high, or higher, than they expected? Did the Lord show them anything through the process?

Discuss the fact that we are wading into the more significant fruit. Talk about the personal discipline needed to stay with God on this item of kindness. Discuss the sections that explain Level 2 Kindness. Why is it called “Level 2”?

Invite the members to all share one situation in which they found themselves struggling to be kind with someone. Start with an example of your own to let them know something of what you are asking, and to give them time to reflect and select their response.

What is the most difficult thing about being kind and gracious when under pressure or stress? Discuss: Of the three “how to’s” discussed under, “Bearing Much Fruit,” where are your group members in those “how to’s”? That is, which of these do you want (or need to) work on most? Start with yourself as an example.

As deeper needs emerge in the discussion, make note of them. Jot down the group member first name and exactly what they said they need to do to take that next “how to” step. Make those needs the focus of your prayer time together. Those “needs” were the request list for prayer time tonight. Challenge your group to take this seriously. Encourage them to take one person this week to pray for every day that they will take that next significant step toward being more kind.

Then, you close in prayer.

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Lesson 7: Goodness – Love in Action!

Welcome everyone back and point out that the study today is perhaps the single most significant part of the Fruit of the Spirit. Ask for a volunteer to pray for God's guidance and blessing on the group. To start (actually, well *before* your group meets), ask someone to read the opening section of a half dozen paragraphs or so.

When done, ask group members to recall a time they were disciplined. Have them include how they *felt* when it was over. Relieved that it was over? Angry at themselves for getting into trouble? Resolved to never get into trouble again? Angry at the *parent* who disciplined them?

In the accounts of being punished, point out anything you observed about *how* they were disciplined...what was the tone from the parent? Did they hear their parents explaining why the punishment was important? Did any parents state objectives about helping them become *good* people when they grew up?

As Scripture points out, no punishment seems good at the time, but that God has a divine purpose in correcting us. He cares about us and wants us to be consistent and faithful. Ask your group if they remember a time God disciplined them.

Have your group discuss openly the correlation between what we are (internal) and how we live (external). Do temptations initiate externally or internally? Do we stand for good and right internally or externally?

At the end of the section titled, "Bearing Much Fruit," the writer says, "When we are severed from our life-source of godly love, so is the action to which God calls us." Does your group agree? Disagree? Why or why not?

As a group, discuss *specific ways* we can allow the Holy Spirit to produce goodness in us. Suggest one or two yourself to get them started. For example, you might suggest that we ask God to point out any particular behavior or attitude that is counterproductive to goodness. You could suggest that we stop and take time with God every few weeks (or once a month) to ask God to identify anything in us that is not good.

Close with prayer a bit differently: Explain that we are here to encourage each other and help one another grow in grace. Have members identify some relationship in their lives in which they want God to develop *goodness* within them. As they go around the room, one by one, after each person shares, ask someone to volunteer to pray for that person and the exact thing they will be working on. The more precise or particular the setting or relationship, the better. Watch to see that everyone shares something. Then, ask the group members to pray for the person for whom they volunteered to pray.

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me?"

Psalm 51:10 (NIV)

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Lesson 8: 24/7 Christians

Welcome everyone warmly and open with a prayer that God will help us see what “next steps” he would have us take.

Then, just for fun, have everyone describe their week with one or two words. Maybe you could start by telling them yours and why that word describes the week. (Doing that will give group members a better idea of what you’re asking for... and a moment for them to think about their own weeks).

A great way to start this week would be with a personal testimony! If you know someone who has shared a time they made a giant step of commitment in their spiritual walk, before the group gets together, ask them if they would share as you begin today. (And you may have a time of your own when you completely surrendered everything to God and committed to serve him.)

For those who have taken the Fruit of the Spirit Assessment, encourage them to recall or look back through the instrument on this topic of faith or faithfulness. Did they rate as they expected to? Did anyone have some insight into how to take a “next step” so God can develop you more as a “faithful” person?

An excellent idea, for you as a leader, is to jot first names down as people respond and note by their name what is their next step. This will give you an EXCELLENT way to pray for them and help you follow up with significant and valuable discussion in coming weeks.

Give members a moment to look back through the lesson and to think about it, but then ask what one or two ideas really caught their attention about faithfulness. Perhaps follow up with a question like, “Why do you suppose that caught your eye?” or “Was that insight more a matter of new understanding or more of guidance for your life?”

To go a step further, in the “Thinking it Through” section there is a list of six steps common to the Christian journey. Perhaps go through the list and ask your group to volunteer where they might be in their walk. (This can be especially significant if members of your group know each other well.) Encourage each person to move to the next step and/or celebrate with them the progress they report.

Close with prayers particularly for those who have been vulnerable in sharing.

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Lesson 9: “Gentle as You Go”

Being gentle is not a highly valued characteristic in our day. Begin by leading (or having an assistant lead) prayer. Focus on Christian qualities needed in our society. Pray that God will give your group a new grasp of being gentle in the biblical sense of the word.

Open with a brief discussion among group members about how they rated on the *Fruit of the Spirit Assessment*. (Note: Any members can use the score sheet to go back to the questions (and how they answered them. For example, Gentleness can be traced to questions # 15, 16, 33, 34, 51, 52, and so forth. Sometimes looking over the particular questions and answers sheds light on why we scored as we did.)

In the section, “Staying Connected,” there are two implications of being yokefellows with Christ. Ask group members where they are on each of those implications. That is, do members need to focus more on discovering the direction God is going or on “sharing the load,” taking on responsibility to care, love, and serve?

Read the last two paragraphs in the section, “The Root of the Matter – Biblical Foundation.” Give the group some quality time to discuss this section. Help them keep on track in the discussion...when a topic gets close to home, some may feel a bit nervous and even unintentionally move to another subject. Try to keep your group on the work of the Holy Spirit producing gentleness in us.

Use the little graph (the scale from 1 to 10 under “Thinking It Through”) to help group members identify where they are on the Scale of Gentleness. The point of this exercise is to help individuals honestly assess how they are doing at this point. If improvement is needed, that will give something specific to pray that the Holy Spirit will give them grace to become.

In closing, try to summarize some discoveries people are making. Invite all group members to help you recall the insights this meeting. Celebrate the lessons learned about themselves and the ground gained in their desire to grow in the Fruit of the Spirit. Close with prayer thanking God for the discoveries and supporting every member in their “next steps” toward Spirit-led living.

“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”

Philippians 4:5 (NIV)

Bearing Spiritual Fruit in the Power of the Spirit

Lesson 10: Self-Control – Running to Win!

To open, invite group members to share an interesting story about a race. It might be from a high school track team, an Olympic runner's experience (Zola Budd's tragic loss comes to mind from the 80s Olympics) or perhaps the experience of a friend or family member. Build on any stories that illustrate the importance of discipline, of commitment, or of following through to the end of the race. (Ideally, start with one of yours to give them a moment to reflect and prepare to share theirs.)

Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training.

Before the group starts, arrange for someone to read 1 Peter 1:13-15, and another to read 1 Corinthians 9:24-25 at this point. Give the group a moment to reflect (perhaps to re-read the sections silently). Then ask how they would summarize those two sections. (Give members a few moments to re-read and then reflect on the verses so they don't feel pressured.) Maybe write out one of the group's favorite summaries:

If your group feels comfortable (they are close enough, trusting enough, and open enough) invite them to share what they perceive to be common grounds in which our discipline or self-control is tested daily. This may become personal, so watch carefully for those who might become embarrassed after sharing. An excellent way to make this less threatening or uncomfortable is to celebrate openness and honesty. "Bob, what you shared is VERY significant. I appreciate your candor," or "Mary, that took courage to share, and I know many of us wrestle with those very temptations." This support helps your group feel comfortable "going deeper."

Discuss the question in the third paragraph of this chapter's introduction: "How do we keep from yielding to the acts of the sinful nature?" That is a pivotal question for the entire study, and especially this one on self-control. Jot down some practical ways we can stand up against temptation.

Close with conversational prayer (perhaps reminding everyone how this is done). Encourage them to genuinely thank God for the insights and to pray earnestly for grace to face these pressures in the future.