

The Fruit of the Spirit

LOVE

JOY

PEACE

PATIENCE

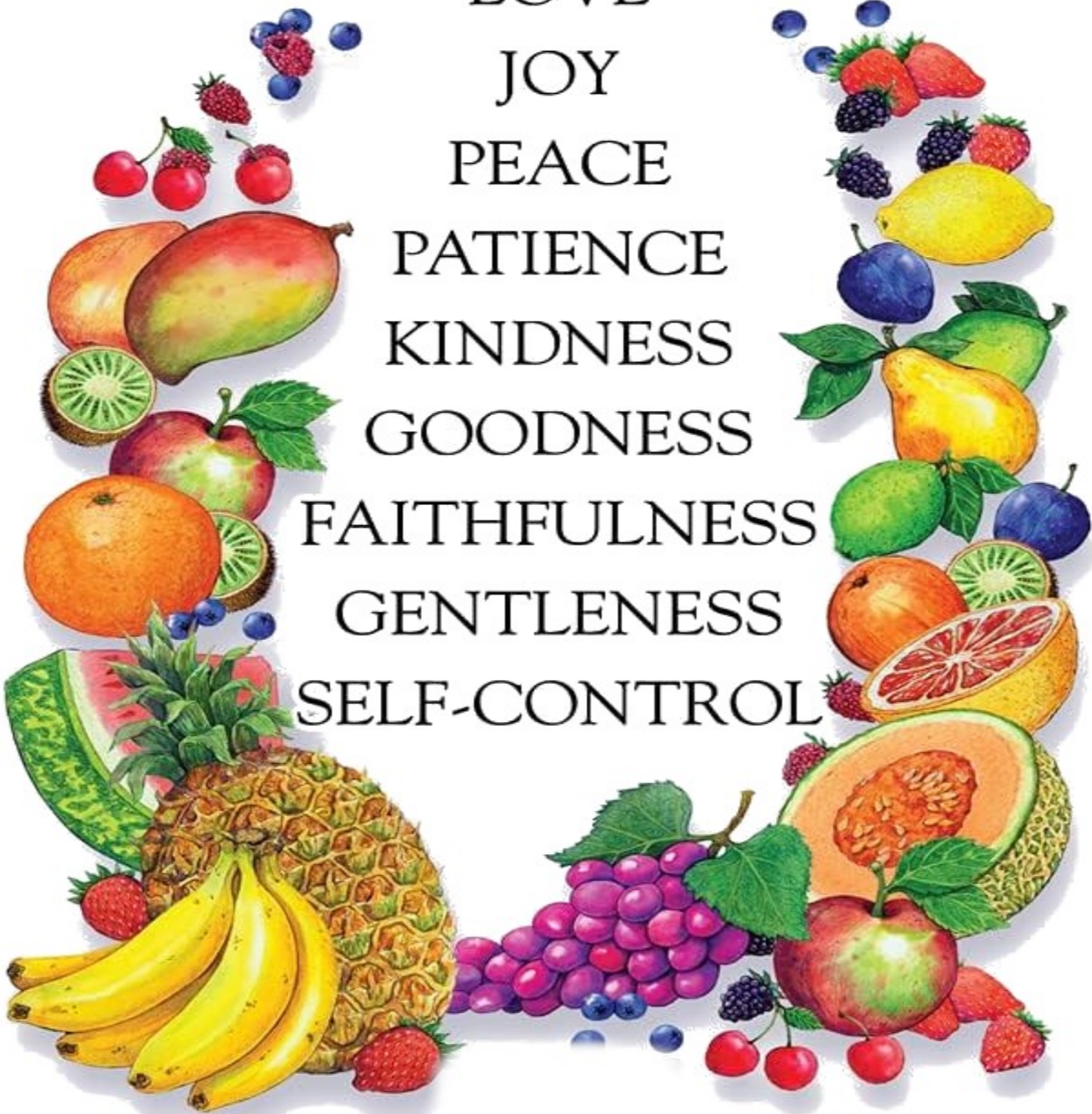
KINDNESS

GOODNESS

FAITHFULNESS

GENTLENESS

SELF-CONTROL



Jack County Cowboy Church

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Bible Study: The Fruit of the Spirit

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Intro:

In one of His final conversations with His disciples, Jesus talked about the importance of fruit-bearing. He said in **John 15:1-5**, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener . . . I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.”

Jesus used the analogy of the vine to teach about the necessary relationship which must exist between the Holy Spirit and the believer so that Christ-likeness may be produced in the believer. It is the Holy Spirit who produces spiritual fruit in us as we yield to Him. The fruit of the spirit is the character of Christ produced in us, so that we might show the world what he is like.

In a vine, the branches depend upon the trunk for life, and the vine needs the branches to bear its fruit. Jesus told His disciples that He had come into the world to show the world what the Father is like. He said that when He went away He would send the Holy Spirit to be with them and help them. The Spirit would reveal Jesus to them. As Jesus took a human body to reveal the Father to the world, so the eternal Spirit dwells within the believer to reveal Christ to the world.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians in **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**, Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

This study is to see what the Bible says about the fruit of the Spirit, which is the Christian character, and how it is produced in your life by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that you may honor God.

The principle of fruit-bearing is revealed in the first chapter of the bible in **Genesis 1:11**: “Then God said, ‘Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.’”

Note that each plant and tree was to produce fruit according to its kind. Spiritual fruit-bearing follows the same principle. John the Baptist said in **Matthew 3:8** to the Pharisees and Sadducees, Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

The fruit of the spirit is character’s that reveals what Jesus is like. It is the outward expression of the holy nature of God in the believer. It is actually the development of the life of Christ in the Christian.

Galatians 5:16–26, describes a spiritual conflict between the sinful nature and the divine nature. The conflict is this, **Galatians 5:17**, “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.” The word contrary means “opposite in character.” When the believer does not yield to the Spirit’s control, he is unable to resist the desires of the sinful nature. But when the Spirit is in control, he is like fertile ground in which the Spirit can produce His fruit. By the power of the Spirit he can overcome the desires of the flesh and live an abundant and fruitful life. To win in this spiritual conflict, the secret is to walk in the Spirit. **Galatians 5:24-25** says, Those who belong to Christ Jesus

have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

How do we do this? By Listening to His voice, Following His leading, Obeying His orders, and Trusting and depending on Him.

To show how sharp is the contrast between the acts of the sinful nature and the fruit of the Spirit, Paul, writer to the Galatians listed them in the very same chapter. As long as the Holy Spirit is in control, abiding in and empowering the believer, He naturally manifests His fruit in the believer. Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.

In the same manner, the sinful nature of the unbeliever produces its work in him. Do you see the principle of fruit-bearing here? Each produces fruit after its kind.

If you have yielded control of your life to the Holy Spirit, He will unfailingly produce in you the fruit of the Spirit in a continuous and plentiful harvest. As a Christian, all of the genuine and lasting beauty of character adorning your life, the Christ likeness, inward and outward, is the work of the Holy Spirit in you.

Jesus used the grapevine and its branches to picture the kind of relationship that must exist between Himself and the believer in order for the believer to have fruitfulness. One does not need to be an expert in gardening to realize that what is of greatest importance in a grapevine is the quality of fruit the vine bears. This is seen in the way Jesus spoke about the branches of the vine.

John 15:2 says, He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

The purpose of a branch is to bear fruit. If a branch does not bear fruit, it is of no value to the gardener, so he cuts it off. A sad example of this kind of judgment is found in the history of the nation of Israel. Israel was designed to be God's vineyard, to reflect God's love, mercy, goodness, and glory among the nations. But Israel failed, and judgment followed. Here is what God said about the failure of Israel as His vineyard.

Isaiah 5:4-5, What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled.

It is impossible for these branches to bear fruit, because they are not a part of the vine. Have you noticed that a branch which has been broken off soon begins to turn brown and die? Because it is broken, the vital connection to the life of the vine is severed. No longer can the life-giving resources flow into the branch, and without this the branch quickly dies. Then it is gathered up and burned.

The gardener wants the life-giving resources of the vine to flow into the fruit rather than into worthless leaves and branches. Therefore, in order to produce more and better fruit, pruning or trimming of the branch is a necessary process. God's plan for us is that we produce much fruit. He sends His Holy Spirit to justify us, indwell us, and sanctify us in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 6:11 says, Some of us were once like that. But we were cleansed, you were made holy, you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

There is a necessity of bearing spiritual fruit in our lives. **Matthew 7:15–23** says, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

In Matthew 7:15–23 we have some striking sayings from the lips of our Savior about the necessity of producing Christian character. False prophets, He said, would be recognized by the kind of fruit they produce. Jesus went on to say that there would even be those who cast out demons in His name whom He never knew. How is this possible?

This Scripture declares that it is possible for miracles and gifts of the Spirit to be imitated by Satan. But a man’s true relationship to Christ can be known by observing whether the fruit of the Spirit or the works of the flesh are produced in his character, a good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit.

Christian character cannot be imitated. It is the natural result of Christ revealing His holy character in and through us.

In considering the purpose for spiritual fruit-bearing, we will look at three aspects, which have to do with expression, discipleship, and glory.

Every fruit is an expression of the life of the plant from which it comes. In the same way, as members of Christ’s body, there should naturally be an expression of the full beauty of the character of Christ in us. For what purpose do you exist? Has God saved you just so you will sit in a church building for a few hours each week? No! You exist to live out the teaching you receive, to reveal Christ to this sinful and lost world. People need to see Him through the lives of Christians. When they take notice of our profession to be Christians, we may become the only Bible that many of them will ever “read.” A life given to Christ expresses to others the kind of love He has for them. When I am an expression of Christ, my ears will hear their cries, my eyes will see their needs, my feet will take me to help them, and my hands will reach out to care for them. In this way I will become a channel of the life of Christ. He will minister to them through me. Are you a channel of the life of Christ? Does He minister to others through you?

To cultivate means to encourage, to prepare for growth, discipleship. Long before the first blossoms

appear or the initial signs of the fruit are seen, much has been done to prepare the plant for the expected fruit. The gardener carefully tends the plant so that it will be more productive. This tender, caring process is cultivation. It is in our relationship with God, through continuous fellowship, that our lives are changed and developed toward fruition. As a child of God, you enjoy blessed fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **1 Corinthians 1:9** says, God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

You can cultivate this fellowship by spending time with God in communion and prayer. You can also cultivate it by obeying His Word. When Jesus taught His disciples about spiritual fruit, He told them to let His words remain in them. **John 15:7** says, But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!

A gardener usually finds it desirable to have plants grouped according to the fruit each produces. All of the orange trees will be planted together, all of the corn will be together in one field, and so forth. This aids cultivation and the reaping of the harvest. Through fellowship with other Christians you can be encouraged to live the Christian life, and you can encourage others. The first Christians had fellowship with each other every day. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity. **Acts 2:46**. It is no wonder their lives were powerful testimonies for the gospel and made those around them thirsty for salvation. There was a daily harvest of souls as the Lord added to their number those who were being saved, all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. **Acts 2:47**.

It is sometimes difficult to tell the difference between real and imitation fruit. The imitation fruit can give the impression of being real, but if you try to eat it, immediately you know that it is not real.

I remember once, my wife had some imitation apple setting in a bowl. I mean these things look real. One of the grandkids grabbed one and tried to take a bite out of it. Didn't work out so good for him. Everyone had a good laugh and I think we got him a real one instead.

The same analogy may be made of Christians. On the surface it may be difficult to distinguish between a person who truly is like Christ and one who merely has an outward appearance of a Christian. They may display similar behaviors such as a manifestation of spiritual gifts, but the true test comes as the inward character of the individual is expressed in his everyday life.

Jesus said that true disciples of His are known by the quality of love they express towards each other. The fruit of the Spirit is so very important in our lives! The Christians who lived in Corinth at the time the New Testament was written exercised nine gifts of the Spirit, they spoke with tongues, they prophesied, they performed miracles. However, they lacked the fruit of the same Spirit, they competed with one another in their local assembly.

1 Corinthians 11:17-18, In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.

We know what the fruit of the spirit are but how do we grow them? We may have heard the phrase "the fruit of the spirit" in church before, but never truly understood the meaning of the verses found in **Galatians 5:22-23**. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law.

In these, Paul lists nine attributes of the Holy Spirit, which appear in Christians when they are indwelt by him. In other words, when God indwells us, and we spend more time with him, we begin to emanate his attributes. This is just like when we spend more time with a person, we begin to look and sound like them. But why are these singular? In other words, why isn't it the "fruits" of the Spirit?

Why these nine, and why does this bear an importance on the church today?

Love heads the list. Because God is love it says in **1 John**. Love is the most important out of these nine.

1 John 4:7-21, Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

But what about the others? Why did Paul choose these in the list and no other admirable attributes? Let's break each of them down. **Joy**, first of all, goes deeper than a mere happiness. As it further explains, joy comes from the radiance, the brightness of God himself. In such a presence of brightness, we can experience comfort during difficult trials.

Peace goes hand in hand with this attribute. Peace extends to others and our inner selves. With it, we have comfort in knowing God heals this broken world. Love, joy, and peace appear to go together. It shows our relationship with God. When we spend time with God, we are full of love, full of heavenly joy, and full of peace.

The next three, get lumped into a triad, patience, kindness, and goodness. These especially manifest themselves in our relationships with others, opposed to the first three showing up more in our relationship with God. Instead of choosing to retaliate, we endure sufferings and choose to love others. We refuse to add to the fire of antagonism.

Our final triad, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control, refers to how we handle opposition. When we face temptation or people who attempt to sway us from righteous living or from Christ himself, we lean on these three virtues.

So why does Paul say "fruit of the spirit" instead of "fruits"? As Christians, we may get tempted to focus on one fruit at a time. "Today I'll work on patience. Tomorrow, self-control." But the Holy Spirit does not work like that. When we submit to God fully and allow him to transform us, all of this fruit should appear in our lives. We are more patient with our dealings with others, joy fills us more, we

exercise more self-control, etc.

A particularly jarring passage happens in Matthew. **Matthew 21:18-22** says, Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked. Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

Mark 11:12-25, He said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” And His disciples heard it. They came to Jerusalem, and He went into the temple complex and began to throw out those buying and selling in the temple. He overturned the money changers’ tables and the chairs of those selling doves, and would not permit anyone to carry goods through the temple complex. Then He began to teach them, “Is it not written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves!” Then the chief priests and the scribes heard it and started looking for a way to destroy Him. For they were afraid of Him, because the whole crowd was astonished by His teaching. And whenever evening came, they would go out of the city. Early in the morning, as they were passing by, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. Then Peter remembered and said to Him from, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!” “Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

A lack of fruit in a Christian’s life shows a waning or even lack of a relationship with the holy spirit. When we lack fruit, we become susceptible to the devil’s lies and schemes. After all, if we don’t spend time with god, we’ll forget what He’s like, or why we should care about his plan for us. But then we don’t display Christ correctly to the world.

Many times, non-Christians will avoid asking questions about the Christian faith because they’ve encountered believers who lack fruit. Believers who are rude, mean, selfish, or lacking in any of the fruit of the spirit can deter people who may have otherwise investigated Christianity more.

Even more they may have works the works of the flesh which are, sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar.

Paul says, I tell you about these things in advance, as I told you before, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. **Galatians 5:19-21.**

Paul basically says, We need to avoid these things at all costs.

Christians can often have the misconception that they have to earn the fruit of the Spirit. Maybe if they gave more at church or spent more time doing community service, then they will learn patience, or gentleness, or goodness. This is simply not the case.

We must first go to God and spend more time with him. We must analyze scripture and learn all we can about our Creator. We'll see his love, joy, peace, etc. and how he has blessed us. When we do so, we cannot help but love others. We cannot help but exercise faithfulness. Because we see a good God, and we allow that good God to change us from the inside out. Not the other way around.

Even if we have made a lifelong commitment to him before now, we need to surrender ourselves to his will daily. This means allowing him to transform us, even when it hurts. Christians must stop trying to "polish up" their lives before submitting to the Spirit. Trying to grow fruit without the Holy Spirit is like trying to grow fruit on an uprooted tree.

We need the holy spirit to Water us and sustain us before we can start producing fruit. Christians don't always succeed at growing fruit. We can stumble into sin and lose sight of the character of Christ in our actions. However, we should be seeing a steady growth. When looking back on our formative Christian years, we should see how we've grown to be more patient, kind, joyful, loving, etc. If we see a lack of growth over a long period of time, it may be time to spend more time with God and seek him earnestly.

As believers, we want nonbelievers to see the same in us. We do so by spending more time with God. Christ lived out these traits in His everyday life, and we are to strive to do the same as we spiritually mature. Believers are not able to live out each trait without staying connected to Christ. Our flesh will fail us, and we will fall short in our attempts. We must rely on the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit to help us live out each fruit with courage, conviction, and boldness. Each fruit is produced, nurtured, and developed over time. In order to live out each fruit consistently, we must continue to surrender our desires to God's will and trust Him. As we grow and continue to imitate Christ's nature, we will activate and strengthen living out the fruit of the Spirit each day. The fruit of the Spirit is not an outdated list of traits, but are active, necessary, and relevant today. In a world where instant success and ambition often reign supreme, it is essential that we continue to live out each fruit of the Spirit with boldness and conviction.

Living out the fruit the Spirit represents an opportunity for God's hope and restoration to permeate each believer. We cannot live out the fruit of the spirit on our own. Living out each fruit represents God working in and through us.

Practicing the fruit of the spirit encourages us and others that there is another way to respond, behave, and live. Living out each fruit requires us to pause, pray to God for wisdom, and allow God to give us courage to choose differently.

The good news is that each fruit of the Spirit represents the active and dynamic nature of God. Apart from Christ, our flesh is weak and we must rely on God's spirit to strengthen and encourage us to live out each fruit willingly, without compulsion.

In a world of ongoing confusion and strife, living out the fruit of the spirit is necessary to continue to be men and women of strong character. Our character and how we respond to varying situations is essential as believers to stay encouraged, and serve as a testimony to others who are struggling.

As we rely on God's spirit to strengthen and encourage us to live out each fruit consistently, we will find that our attitudes and behaviors will align more with Christ. Our households, relationships, and spiritual lives will strengthen, as well as our personal development.

Living out each fruit of the Spirit is not a legalistic command by God, but an open invitation for us to choose differently, represent God better, develop stronger character, strengthen our attitudes, and restore hope in a broken world. When we fall short within our own strength, it is God's Holy Spirit that we must rely on for encouragement and strength to start anew.

Whether it is love, joy, peace, patience, forbearance, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, or self-control, we all have an opportunity to live out the positive traits of Christ each day.

The fruit we bear will be a witness to the world that the God we serve is faithful.

As we go through each one of these fruit, I hope to give us a better understanding and hopefully we can apply each to our lives for Christ.

Lesson on **Love**.

Before we dive into the love chapter of 1 Corinthians 13, I want to begin by taking a look again at Galatians 5.

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

One of the most important and powerful things in the universe is Love.

These are all the qualities of character the Spirit seeks to install in us as we grow in grace. These are the virtues that frame our life in Christ. At the head of the list is LOVE. In fact, some scholars think that love is THE fruit of the Spirit, and that joy, peace and all the rest are the expressions or flavors of that Fruit.

So what Is Love? All of us may think we know what love is until we are asked to define it.

Certainly there are forms of love that come naturally to people. Children often think of love as affection, hugs and kisses. Many people think of love as the romantic attachment or even the physical attraction between a man and a woman.

Others will point out a mother's unflagging care for her children as an example of one of the purest forms of natural love. In fact, a mother's love can help us understand and sort love out from affection and romance. A mother loves her children even when they misbehave. She loves them when they are miserably sick, look pallid, and are unable to return affection. It shows us that love is an unselfish choice to be dedicated to someone else's good, no matter what the other person is like.

In the Greek, there are 4 main words translated as "love." **Eros** was sexual love. Thus we get our word erotic from it. Eros isn't really love at all. It simply refers to physical intimacy & pleasure. **Storge** is the love of family. This speaks of the devotion family members have toward one another because of familial loyalty. **Philia** is the affection friends share. This kind of love carries the ideals of devotion and loyalty. It's the highest kind of love man or woman can muster on their own.

Then there's Agape which is the highest kind of love. Whereas the previous 3 loves require a reciprocity in order to work, agape is unilateral. It doesn't wait for or depend on anything outside the one who gives it. Agape gives without demanding or expecting anything in return. It gives to the unlovable and unappealing. It continues even when rejected. Agape loves because it wants to.

A mistake often made when considering agape is to think it's not an emotion. That's only partially true, it would be best to say it's MORE than an emotion. Eros, storge, and philia also aren't only emotions. But they carry an emotional element to them, often times a strong feeling. Eros is marked by desire. Storge produces a deep loyalty. Philia is attended by a profound devotion to friends. These emotions produce actions which give evidence to them. The same is true with Agape. Agape is a strong desire, a passion, to bless another for their sake without concern for reward. And just like the other 3 loves, real agape produces action.

The Bible also speaks of love that does not come naturally, but as the supernatural fruit of the Holy Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love...." in **Galatians 5:22**. Love is found throughout the Bible. But no chapter of the Bible gets down to the nitty gritty of what love is more than **1 Corinthians 13**. Because of this, this chapter is called the "love chapter."

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 reads like this:

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

There's value in breaking this down verse by verse, phrase by phrase, and word by word, but if we do, we can lose sight of Paul's larger point, which is that love has to be the motive-core for all we do. You may have the gift of tongues, or prophecy, or have amazing insight into spiritual things. But if your gifts don't flow from love, they're worthless. You may have the gift of special faith so that you can perform great feats of the miraculous. But if what you do isn't shaped by love, it's nothing!

You can perform amazing acts of benevolence, even become a martyr. If love isn't the root, there's no profit in it. These words were a stinging rebuke to the Corinthians! As they read them they realized that in the midst of all their arguing about which gifts were greater, they'd lost sight of the primacy of love.

You see, there was one thing that was beyond dispute and well known by all believers since the beginning of the church, Love was central! Love is the mark and the measure of true Christianity.

In **John 13:34-35** Jesus said, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

With Paul's words here, the Corinthians realized they'd forgotten this central, most important part of the Faith.

Looking at the Letter Jesus wrote to the Church at Ephesus in Revelation 2, He commends them for their zeal to maintain right doctrine and for their diligence to stay busy with good deeds. But He threatens to withdraw His presence from them if they do not return to the most important thing, love! **Revelation 2:4**, Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. The warning Jesus gives is shocking, He will not stick around a loveless church.

Paul knew some of the Corinthians, reading this, would respond with, "Hey, we love God. We love each other." So he goes on to describe the kind of love he's speaking of. It's not a "said love", it's a motivation that works itself out in many ways to that bring blessing to others.

The first definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4 is, "Love is patient." The Greek word translated "patient" is makrothumei. It means "long-passioned." What is meant by this is to not lose heart, to patiently endure through suffering or persecution or offense, and to not get angry or seek vengeance.

The next word Paul uses to describe love is "kind." The Greek word is chr steuetai. This word is based on the Greek word for hand and refers to something, such as a tool, that fits the hand easily. Jesus used a similar word when He said, "My yoke is easy" in **Matthew 11:30**. He meant that His yoke was not a burden, and it did not cause a problem when used. Thus, what Paul means in 1 Corinthians 13:4 is that the person who loves serves without being a problem.

Next, Paul says, "love does not envy." The Greek word z loi means to be hot or boil. It is sometimes used in a good way for a good zeal or desire. But here, Paul means that someone who loves does not burn with envy over the blessings or possessions of someone else. When someone is blessed, we should rejoice with him or her, not be jealous. In **Romans 12:15**, Paul tells us to, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep", and in **1 Corinthians 12:26**, he says, "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." This is love.

Paul then says, "love does not boast, is not puffed up." These two ideas are tied together. The word "boast" is from perpereuetai, which means boast or brag. "Puffed up" comes from phusioutai. It means to inflate. In other words, someone who loves does not puff himself up by boasting. If someone tells you he knows more about something or has better things than you, or can do something better than you, does this make you feel good? No. When people say things like this, they are only thinking of how good it makes them feel, and not of how badly it makes you feel, unless, of course, they have a goal of making you feel bad. It is not love. Someone who loves will not exalt himself. He will ask you about yourself and take an interest in what you have done. You can then show love in return and ask him about himself and take an interest in what he has done.

Paul continues by saying that love does not behave disgracefully or proud, does not seek its own or self-seeking, or dishonor, is not provoked to anger, thinks no evil.

The word translated "disgracefully" is asch monei. It literally means "behave with a disorganized configuration." Thus, what it means here is to behave indecently or chaotically in a way that does not conform to decent standards and manners. This behavior makes others feel upset or ill at ease. If someone ran through a store we were in naked, we would feel uneasy. If someone is running around screaming when people are trying to hold a conversation, he or she is causing those people to be upset. These examples are, of course, extremes. But the point is that Paul is writing of behavior that does not conform to accepted patterns and is thus self-centered, inconsiderate of others, and unloving.

It "does not seek its own" is behavior that doesn't put our own wants ahead of others. Seeking our own wants first is the opposite of love. Love seeks the comfort, happiness, well-being, and so forth, of others. It is putting others ahead of self. When we seek our own interests first, we are not showing the love that God wants us to have. It is entirely unnatural for us to put others ahead of ourselves, but we should be aware of this and ask God, who is the source of all love, for help. We may start off small and slow, but we will grow as we depend on the Holy Spirit to fuel our love.

The Greek word translated as "provoked to anger" is *paroxunetai*. It is related to the Greek word for acid, and I think a good translation is "irritated." The NIV says, "not easily angered." Love is not provoked or irritated, easily or not. When we are irritated, we are, consciously or subconsciously, saying in ourselves, "I am being put out, my needs are being trampled, I shouldn't have to put up with this, and I am not happy about it." Oftentimes, we will think we are doing well to put up with an irritation. Many times, it will be only minutes or even only seconds after we think this that we explode. Why? Because we were irritated and looking to our own power to keep the irritation under control. If we were looking to God, we would see ourselves for who we are, and that we have no right to be irritated in the first place. These are the kinds of things that drive us to God for help.

Next, we read that love "keeps no record of wrongs ." It means to log something, to record it in a ledger, to take account of, reckon, or impute. Also, the word evil here can also mean bad or injurious and it has a definite article. Thus, this says that love "does not keep an account of the bad." What bad? The bad things or injurious things or evil done to the person. We see, then, that this can be connected with the previous statement about not being irritated. How do we get irritated? By keeping an account of how someone is injuring us. He does this, that, and the other thing, and finally we reach the last straw and we blow up. Love doesn't keep an account of wrongs. Thus, it instantly forgives and forgets.

Verse 6 says, "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth" Paul continues by saying that love "does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth." The word "rejoice" is from the Greek word *chairei*. It means to be full of cheer. "delight in evil" means either unrighteousness or injustice. In the Greek here, it has a definite article, so it should be "the unrighteousness," or "the injustice."

Let's keep this in mind and go on to the second half of the verse. The words "rejoices with" are one word in the Greek. It is *sunchairei*. This is *chairei*, which we have just seen means to rejoice or be full of cheer, plus *sun*, which means to be in union with.

I believe that Paul's thoughts in the two halves of this verse are directly related. He is saying that love does not rejoice or take any pleasure in evil, the unrighteousness and injustice so common in this world, but it rejoices with the truth of the Gospel. By simple definition, the opposite of evil is good, the opposite of unrighteousness is righteousness, and the opposite of injustice is justice. But Paul contrasts it with the truth. I believe this is because Paul understands that the truth of the Gospel is the only way to righteousness and justice. That is, by believing the Gospel or the Good News, we are justified from our sins and given the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

But who would rejoice in unrighteousness? Remember that verse 5 ends by saying, "does not keep an account of the wrongs." But this does not end the sentence, so that verse 6 continues the thought. There is a natural tendency to keep an account of people's wrongs. By doing this, we eventually get irritated with them. But going hand-in-hand with this, we can also take a perverse pleasure in their sins. Keeping track of the sins of others can help us feel good about ourselves. When we keep tabs on how bad others are, we tend not to see how bad we are. This is rejoicing in their iniquity. The opposite is the truth. The truth says we are all sinners, that trying to make ourselves feel better by keeping account of others' sins is a lie, and that our only hope is to trust in Jesus Christ to save us. It is humbling, but it is freeing and this truth actually causes us to rejoice, as Paul puts it.

In verse 7 it says, It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Verse 7 might be called the "always" verse. This word means to be persuaded by, to put confidence in, have faith in, or to trust.

Lastly, we see in verse 8 that love "never fails." It literally means to "stay." Thus, it means the ability to bear something or to stay with it.

Jesus told His followers, And you will be hated by all on account of My name. But he who endures to the end shall be saved in **Mark 13:13**. **Hebrews 12:2** tells us that Jesus endured the cross. Paul said in **2 Timothy 2:10**, I endure all things for the sake of the elect.

Although we can take this in the sense of a personal application, that we should never stop loving, Paul is speaking on a larger scale. He means that through all of the ages and eternity, there will always be love.

"Love never fails.

Lesson on **JOY**.

I want to begin by taking a look again at Galatians 5. This is so we can keep in mind the fruit of the spirit.

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy**, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Joy is something we all desire, and something God wants us all to experience. Yet the joy He has for us is more than a feeling of pleasure. The joy He gives is characterized by an inner well of strength. It is a joy that cannot be shaken by circumstances, regardless of how difficult our circumstances may become. This is the type of joy Paul knew and gave us the keys to in his wonderful epistle to the believers at Philippi. His writing, inspired by the Holy Spirit, imparted the wisdom of God regarding the experience of joy.

"Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: rejoice!" These words were not written by a contemporary person sitting in a plush chair surrounded by books on how to achieve happiness. The apostle Paul was writing from the physical and emotional discomfort of a prison as he awaited news of a possible death sentence. Not only this, but he at one time or another had faced misunderstanding, sickness, abandonment by friends, persecution by enemies, imprisonment, doubts and despair. But in spite of the uncertainties and tensions, we see a man whose life was filled with joy.

Almost everyone is seeking more joy in life, and the book of Philippians has been called God's guide to joy. In the face of difficulty and discomfort, how could Paul say it is possible to: "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice!" What were his secrets to a life filled with joy? This is what we will seek to discover as we briefly study this wonderful letter written to the cherished church at Philippi.

Galatians 5:22 tells us that JOY is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, produced by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us. Definition of Joy is, a very glad feeling; great pleasure; emotional excitement over blessings received or expected.

The bible wants us to know it is a gift from God that resides within us and no outward circumstance can take it from us. We can only lose it if we give it away.

Romans 15:13, Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing. . .through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Because joy is a gift from God, anything that takes away your joy is not from God. Therefore, joy becomes a standard of measure of your Christian walk. If you allow your joy to be stolen by someone or something, then that person or thing has become bigger than God to you. It's not just big things that can steal joy, many times it's the little things that we let get us down. Be careful to guard your joy. Let nothing steal it from you.

Joy is your source of strength. **Nehemiah 8:10** ". . . the joy of the Lord is your strength." When you feel weak, and seem to have no strength left, the joy of the Lord will strengthen you if you refuse to feel sorry for yourself, and choose instead to remember that the Lord your God is a holy God and He has promised that His joy is your strength.

His joy is based on His eternal promise of eternal life in glory. The devil tells you that you can't win, God tells you that you can't lose! So, be patient and be strong in the joy of your Lord! God is not honored by sorrow and weeping. He is honored by our joy in Him.

Joy is the reason our prayers are answered. **John 16:24** says, Until now you have asked nothing in My Name; ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full. Joy can't change circumstances that happen, but prayer can. When, as a believer, you pray to the Father in the Name of Jesus about the circumstances in Your life, He has promised that you shall receive the answer to your prayer so that your joy can be full. And, even if the circumstances take time to work out according to God's will, your joy will keep you on top of them, not burdened down underneath them.

Joy is Jesus' joy fulfilled in us. **John 15:11** says, These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. Why was it so important to Jesus that we should be filled with His joy after He returned to heaven? Why would our joy be fulfilled by knowing we were filled with His? It was because He knew the only way we could obey His commandments to His church to love one another would be if we had joy! Depressed people don't give out love; their thoughts are only on themselves. If you're having trouble loving people, and yourself, check your joy level.

Joy is a disciples reward. In **Acts 13:52**, And the disciples were continually filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. In order to be strong against persecution, and to continually carry the message of salvation through Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world, the disciples had to be constantly filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. The more they were put in prison, or beaten, or mistreated, the greater their joy grew. They counted it all joy when they encountered trials, because their faith grew through the trials. Would that we could be such disciples for Jesus!

Joy is unconditional. **Romans 14:17-18** says, The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he that in these things serves Christ is well pleasing to God . . .

Joy is unconditional because it is based on the Word of God and conditions cannot change it. Happiness, on the other hand, is conditional because it is based on circumstances being undisturbed and under control. That's why joy is the third pillar of the Kingdom of God, because if we are serving Jesus with joy, no matter how difficult the circumstances of our life are, then we are very pleasing to God.

Joy is the opposite of sorrow. **John 16:20-22**, Truly, I say to you, 'You shall weep and be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. You now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no man takes from you.

Sorrow is our mental and emotional response to the loss of something or someone we wanted to keep. There can be many kinds of loss that cause sorrow. The death of a loved one; divorce, loss of home or possessions, loss of relationships. And, just as painful, loss of innocence through abuse, loss of hopes and dreams, loss of trust in others, or ourselves, loss of self-esteem, and many more. Even when we are in sorrow, joy is still there inside of us. Jesus said if we will come to Him when we are exhausted in our mind, and overburdened with sorrow, we will find rest and quiet in our spirit, where our joy is, even in the midst of the storms of life. **Psalms 30:5**, Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

Joy can be restored. **Psalm 51:12** says, Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation; and uphold me with Your free Spirit. When we sin, our joy can be lost in guilt and self-condemnation. The overwhelming regret for what we have done can make us feel separated from God, until we accept the forgiveness of our sins that Jesus died to give us. Then we will cry out, as David did when he cried out to God: Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within me: Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation!

Joy is fulfilled in the presence of God. **Psalm 16:11** “. . . in Your presence is fullness of joy; and at your right hand there are pleasures forever.” Joy originates with God. It resides in His presence. We have a measure of joy during our life here on earth that He has given us, but the glorious experience of being completely filled with joy will not happen until we are in His presence. That is the glorious promise of our salvation, that we who have accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord will come to God with singing, and everlasting joy will be upon our head; we shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and crying shall be no more.

Joy is the reason Jesus endured the cross. **Hebrews 12:2** says, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

To be a follower of Jesus, we have to keep ourselves from becoming discouraged by the problems of this world, and by all the sin around us that constantly tries to entangle us and trip us up in our Christian walk. We must keep focused, in our spirit, on Jesus because He is the source of our faith. He endured the opposition and hatred that put Him on the cross, for the joy that was waiting for Him in heaven. When we compare His suffering to our trials, ours will not seem too heavy to bear, knowing we will experience the same joy in heaven with Him. Can you believe it?

Joy is the result of believing in Jesus. **1 Peter 1:8** says, Though now you see Him not, yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Joy is future; it comes from an anticipated event. There has to be a reason for joy. Like a bride who is anticipating her wedding. She has joy for months before the actual wedding, because of the joy that awaits her. We rejoice because we have been born again through the resurrection of Jesus Christ to an inheritance waiting in heaven for us, that cannot be stolen or destroyed. So, even if we have trials and problems now that test our faith, we must still rejoice with joy unspeakable for the glory that is set before us!

Joy is the reward for being faithful to God. **Matthew 25:21** says, Well done good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things, enter into the joy of your Lord.

God gives His children gifts and talents, and He rewards those who use them to glorify Him and win souls. He gives us the faith to use our gifts WHEN we use them. He expects us to use them, that's why He gave them to us. If we hold back in fear, we are of no use in furthering the gospel. But, if we stir up the gifts that are in us, even though they may seem small, we will be rewarded for being faithful and will be given greater works to do and the greater faith to do them. God is faithful! He is the fountain of all joy!

Lesson on **PEACE**

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, **peace**, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

The night before Jesus went to the cross to die, He spoke these words in **John 14:27**, Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Peace is a very powerful word. It comes from a root word that means “to join”. Jesus was facing the most painful suffering and death on the cross the next day, yet He was in perfect peace. He was asking us and His disciples to join ourselves to Him in that kind of peace that can see us through any trial or suffering. His kind of peace that gives rest and quietness to our soul that cannot be taken away by trouble or stress, even the kind of stress that pulls on us and makes us feel like we’re coming apart at the seams. The peace that comes from being joined to Jesus puts us back together again.

He told us not to let our heart be troubled. He wouldn’t have said that if we didn’t have the ability to stop our heart from being troubled or afraid. Our thoughts are the only things that can steal our peace! We choose what we think about! We choose – we choose – we choose. So, if we are troubled, we are choosing to think about our troubles, instead of joining our thoughts with Christ in peace and quietness.

Many times we choose to think about our troubles and remember painful wounds from the past without even realizing we are making a choice. Those things have been such a part of our thinking for so long that our mind just sort of freely grazes from one thought to another without anything to stop it. Jesus knows we do this, that’s why He said don’t let your mind do that anymore.

Philippians 4:6-7 says it this way, Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

What a promise! Two of the most important words in this “peace prayer” are the words “with thanksgiving”. Thanksgiving is giving praise to God and thanking Him because you know He heard your prayer and that it’s in His hands now and you’re not going to worry about it, or think about it anymore.

Another very important part of that verse is that peace will keep guard over our hearts, thoughts and feelings. Some people are easily moved by their emotions, and feelings are more often our guide to decision making than facts are. But feelings can’t be trusted, they can lead us away from truth and what is best for us. Feelings are the way we are deceived and seduced because we are born with a desire to love and comfort.

Wrong choices, made under the stress of emotions and strong feelings, lead to low self-esteem, fear and anxiety. These thoughts can rob our peace. Another source of anxiety are fears that were planted from childhood. Many times we don’t even know where they came from. We don’t know what to call them or what opened the door and let them in. They are nameless fears that sort of float around in our mind like a cloud of anxiety.

Make the decision today to remove the word afraid from your vocabulary. Fear is a thief that steals your peace of mind. Afraid is a word that no longer describes you. The person or thing you fear has power over you. Fear will make you obey it because you gave away your power to it. Take the power back, you decide the issues in your life through Jesus power!

Those who created yesterday's pain do not control today's potential. Potential is power that has not been released yet. Be in control of what you think and what you say. You are not a victim, you are a victor! You are the only person who can give you peace of mind, because you have a will. That makes you like God – no one can overrule His will, and no one can overrule your will, not even God, that's the way He made us like Him.

No one and no thing can steal your peace of mind from you. The only way you can lose it is to give it away as an act of your will. You decide! Peace is yours, "let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Say right now, out loud, "I refuse to be afraid any more. I let the peace of God that passes my understanding, keep guard over my thoughts, my feelings and my mind, in Christ Jesus!

That what each of us need to do today and mean it.

Let's move on deeper into peace. Peace is not something we grow in, such as in starting out with just a little bit of peace. Instead, we are brought back to God forever through the cross of Christ. And we grow in peace with God. The more clearly we see God's ways and walk in them, the more we make use of His power to live as His sons and daughters. In this way, peace with God is a fruit of the Spirit. As we grow up as children of God, we experience more and more the blessings of living in His kingdom. This growth continues until we can say as the psalmist said in **Psalms 119:165**, "Those who love your law enjoy great peace. Nothing can make them trip, [lose footing] and fall.

Jesus is promising to give us peace as a gift? Or does He mean to show us how to get it? Is not Jesus teaching that personal peace is a result of some cause? And is He inviting us to learn that cause from Him? "It is the love of self that brings unrest. Those who accept Christ's word, surrender their souls, and lead their lives according to His teachings will find peace and quiet. Nothing of the world can make them sad when Jesus makes them glad.

Why do you think Jesus was concerned that His disciples have peace? Jesus left us with a beautiful promise about peace. **John 14:27**. I leave my peace with you I give my peace to you I do not give it to you as the world does.

How is the peace of the world different from the peace of Jesus? This is one thing we must not do. We should not try to think of peace as a life without problems. It is very rare for even the most faithful Christian to go through life without troubles, pain, and suffering. Some people have more than their share of suffering. Peace depends on the deepest trust in a loving and caring God who knows how much you suffer and has promised not to forget you.

As Christians, we are asked to keep high standards. These are the standards presented by Jesus Himself. All of us have fallen short of that goal. But it does not mean that we cannot still show the principles shown in the life of Jesus. These are the high principles of love and self-sacrifice.

This is Peace!

Lesson on **Patience**

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, **forbearance**, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

While "patience" and "forbearance" are often used interchangeably, "forbearance" is considered a more specific type of patience, implying a deliberate choice to endure provocation or negativity without reacting, essentially "bearing with" someone even when they might be frustrating or difficult, whereas patience simply refers to the ability to wait calmly without getting upset; so, while they are closely related, forbearance carries a slightly stronger connotation of actively holding back a response in the face of challenges. Patience: Waiting calmly without getting upset. Forbearance: Choosing not to react to something negative, even when you have the power to do so, often implying enduring provocation with restraint.

Some bible versions use the word Long-suffering, but while "patience" and "longsuffering" are often used interchangeably, they are not exactly the same; "patience" refers to the ability to wait calmly for something, while "longsuffering" emphasizes the act of enduring difficult situations or the actions of others without retaliating, essentially implying a longer period of patience with a focus on forbearance and not reacting impulsively to negativity.

Patience: The ability to stay calm while waiting for an outcome that is needed or wanted. We live in an age when we have almost lost the ability to be patient. Our culture is becoming increasingly demanding of the immediate satisfaction provided by instant meals, quick messaging, and same day deliveries. Not having to wait for physical things we need or would like is nice, of course, but people are becoming increasingly impatient. "Delayed gratification" is often seen as an antiquated virtue, and patience itself is often sneered at.

As is sometimes cynically noted, "Patience is something you admire in the driver behind you and scorn in the one ahead." Because we are able to avoid having to be patient in many physical areas today and are increasingly unwilling to wait, we tend to forget a basic truth, that patience is needed for things that really matter in life. As is sometimes said, "You can't microwave character," and the same is true of happiness, strength, and countless other qualities that make life worthwhile and meaningful. It is certainly true that almost every spiritual quality has to be matured through time and needs patience on our part in order for its eventual development to occur.

If we as a culture have almost lost the art of patience, we have also lost sight of much of what patience is. If you look up the word "patience" in a dictionary, you will doubtless find a definition similar to the one that opens this chapter. It will tell you that patience is the ability to wait calmly for a desired outcome or to resist frustration or anger despite provocation. That may be true, but definitions of this kind are sadly limited in helping us to see what else patience is. Patience involves and affects far more in our lives than our ability to simply wait. It is perfectly possible to wait "patiently" for something without waiting properly for it, as is often said, patience involves how we behave while we are waiting. Also, of course, limited definitions like those we have just looked at are not a lot of help in getting a better understanding of how patience works or doesn't, in the human mind, in what ways it is valuable, and how we can develop it.

Fortunately, the Bible gives us a much deeper and richer understanding of what is involved in true patience, one that can help us to increase patience in our lives in a great many ways. There are literally hundreds of verses in the Scriptures that speak of the importance of patience and the need to employ it, but there is no single verse that tells us everything we need to know about this quality. We must bring a number of biblical passages together in order to form a complete picture of what patience is and how to grow it.

Although we may not have a specific biblical verse to guide us in defining patience, several essential aspects of the Bible's teaching on this matter were wonderfully summed up in the words of the Egyptian Christian scholar and teacher, Adel Bestavros (1924-2005): Patience with others is Love, Patience with self is Hope, Patience with God is Faith.

Paul speaks of patience more than any other New Testament writer, in fact, more than any other biblical writer. Perhaps that was because he had to develop a great deal of patience himself. But Paul certainly shows patience to be one of the most important aspects of God's nature and one that we must have if we are to become like him. The apostle shows us not only that patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit of God, but also that it is a quality that can be applied in every area of our spiritual lives. Paul wrote repeatedly about the different aspects of patience and clearly ties them to the three great virtues – faith, hope, and love – that he gives in 1 Corinthians 13:13.

In fact, we can say that spiritually patience is a manifestation of faith, an attitude of hope, and an expression of love. Patience is an underlying ingredient that enables these cardinal qualities to be present and to function properly in our lives.

So when the Bible speaks of patience as one of the fruits of the Spirit and as one of the characteristics enabling us to exercise faith, hope, and love, it is speaking of a quality that goes far beyond the ability to merely wait calmly or to ignore provocation. Patience is involved in these things, of course, but when it is present with a right attitude it is also so much more, it is an active force at the core of our Christian walk. Exhibiting patience is in itself an act of worship and obedience.

When we truly grasp its importance, we come to see that although patience isn't everything, it is needed for virtually everything in our spiritual lives. Seeing what this means in practice can give us a firm foundation in understanding patience that we can then build upon.

The New Testament makes the connection between patience and faith very clear. Consider the involvement of patience and faith in the suffering the Christian may have to endure. Just as he commended the Thessalonians for exhibiting these qualities under persecution, Paul affirms in **Romans 5:3** that, Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance. **James 1:2-3** also tells us to "count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. And Peter makes the same point in **1 Peter 1:6-7**, In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

We can see from these verses that suffering refines our faith, making it stronger, and also produces patience in us. It is to the degree that we develop both patience and faith in situations like this that we are strengthened and endure, and it is that endurance which is ultimately necessary to succeed in the Christian life.

There are many other ways faith and patience interact. Without patience we would not wait for God to help us, change us, or fulfill his many promises to us. In that sense, impatience with God can be a lack of faith or a faith that is short-lived – and faith that only lasts for a while is ultimately not faith at all. Faith without patience produces Christians who may start off well, but who eventually falter and fall away or burn out. On the other hand, patience without faith produces individuals who experience suffering but do not learn and grow from it in the way God intends.

Simply put, patience needs faith and faith needs patience. Patience is itself an act of faith, and developing this important quality helps strengthen our faith!

So it is probably not coincidental that this is the first quality Paul tells us love consists of the patience of those who are provoked or irritated, but who choose restraint. That is why Paul also links patience with kindness. Patience is a primary quality without which love for others cannot exist and one that we must always remember is foundational to love itself.

God will not simply pour patience into us, and we ourselves may not be able to develop as much of it as we need or should have. But as Paul, the apostle of patience, wrote, if we do our best and ask God for the extra help we need, we will find ourselves: “being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might” to “have great endurance and patience” as in **Colossians 1:11**. God desires above all else that we learn to love him and others, and when we trustingly ask him for help to develop the patience we need to do that, Paul says we will receive the power we need. It may take time, but thankfully God is patient in waiting for us to learn patience!

There may be no quick and easy way to develop patience, but there is a super-weapon that we can employ against impatience, one that can greatly increase our patience if we are willing to accept and use it to the full. That superweapon is simply humility.

We have already seen the connection between patience and love that is clear in what Paul says, but we need to look at his thought carefully to see the connection he is also making between humility and patience.

Ephesians 4:1-2, As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

The semicolon directly before “be patient” in the NIV quotation of Ephesians 4:2 above makes it look like there are two separate thoughts, being humble and gentle on the one hand, and being patient and bearing with people on the other. But the ancient Greek in which the New Testament was written did not have punctuation, and this artificial division does not reflect what Paul is really saying.

The difference may seem a small one, but it is important. Paul is not contrasting humility and patience; the sense of the verse is really one continuous subject and thought, with humility, gentleness, and patience being grouped together as related qualities.

This understanding has a tremendously important practical application which we can put into action. When we are feeling impatient with someone, instead of thinking about patience as an abstract goal we can focus on the more concrete qualities that the Bible links with patience, such as compassion, gentleness, and especially humility. This strategy can help control our feelings of impatience in a very real way. After all, when we remind ourselves that we are not the center of the universe, what does it matter that someone is late to meet with us? If we think about what it means to be compassionate, we

can better empathize with the overwhelmed driver in front of us who is holding up the traffic, and so on. If we focus on the other qualities on Paul's list, and again, especially on humility, we don't even have to think about patience directly in order to better apply it. And this principle does not apply only to patience with people. It also applies equally to being patient with events. When we become impatient because events are not working out as we expected or hoped, we are really following an inner assumption that we know what is best in our lives. But when our plans, whether for a single event or our whole lives, don't work out and things don't go as we intended, humility can often help us to see things in a larger perspective. Humility helps us remember that if we are walking with God, then he is ultimately in charge and will guide the circumstances not as we would always choose, but as he sees best. Humility in such situations reminds us that we do not have total understanding of our own lives and how limited we are in wise planning compared to God.

So, whether it is patience with people or patience with events, ultimately patience is most often found in the opposite of pride, in an attitude of humility. The practical application of this fact is that focusing on humility when we do feel impatient can truly help us to develop in this area. Perhaps we may not always improve as quickly as we would desire, but that is part of growing in patience.

So now that we have looked at what patience is and how it interacts with the vital Christian qualities of faith, hope, and love, and have seen how we can develop more patience through humility, we now need to put patience into action.

Lesson on **Kindness**

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, **kindness**, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

In the first part of this lesson Paul showed how love works, patience comes into his mind first. 1 Corinthians 13:4 said, "Love is patient," then Paul writes that love "is kind." It shows that love and kindness are so close that without kindness, no act is truly done in love!

Patience, we learned, is love in action But kindness shows a more active example of love. Often we show patience by doing nothing. But we show kindness by what we say and do, by how we say it and do it, and why we say and do it.

Anyone can show kindness. But it may take the sacrifice of time and energy. Kindness is a verb that shows itself in many ways. And like its close cousin "love," kindness holds wonderful power It shows what our God is like.

Colossians 3:12, Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

God's gifts of grace are just that, they are gifts They are unearned and undeserved by all humans. All humans have willingly sinned against God. They either ignored or neglected Him. In this way the greatest sinner is the same as the holiest saint. No one deserves the kindness and goodness that God gives to us all.

With these verses, Jesus is calling us to be "perfect," even as perfect as God. How? By loving our enemies, by praying for those who mistreat us, and by being kind to those who have not been kind to us. This is what Jesus means by being "perfect."

Try to think what our church would be like and what our homes would be like if we could die to self enough. Then we really could live this way! We would have a power and a witness against which the gates of hell never could succeed. What is the only thing that can stop us? Nothing but our sinful hearts, which cause us to act like Pharisee.

Think for a few minutes about the goodness and kindness of God toward you. Do you deserve it? Is it something that God owes you? Are your thoughts, your actions, your words so selfless, so holy, so loving, and so accepting that God is just doing to you as you have done to others? The answer is No. And here is an important point We understand. God has forgiven us We understand. God loves us no matter what we are and what we have done. So, we truly can understand what it means to be kind and loving to those who do not deserve our kindness or our love.

How important it is that we keep the Cross in mind and remember what it means to us at all times!

Ephesians 4:32 begins with the words, Be kind and compassionate to one another. Think about how this verse fits in perfectly with what we learned, about showing kindness toward others as God has shown kindness toward us.

The Christian should show kindness at all times. But there are at least three special kinds of people who need encouragement.

First, we are to show kindness to spiritual babies, new Christians. **1 Thessalonians 2:7** says, Instead, we were like young children among you.

Second, we are to show kindness and encouragement to the weak. **Romans 15:1** says, We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

Third, we are to serve as a nurse to the spiritually sick. **2 Timothy 2:24-25** says, And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.

Heard someone I worked with at a electronic shop once said, "I cannot wait to get home at night I get so tired of being kind all day!"

What a sad attitude to have toward human life. At home, kindness is important. There is one important way we can show kindness, especially in our homes. It is the way that we talk to one another. The mood of the home is greatly influenced by the words we speak. So many problems, so many hurts, so many bad feelings and fights could be avoided if we were careful about how we use our words. Often one could say something that does not hurt or insult a person. But at the same time, one could say the exact words to the same person and greatly hurt and insult the person. The key is how we speak.

Human speech is more than just the meanings of words themselves. Our faces and voices and actions express show our thoughts, emotions, and ideas. So we must be careful that our body language and the way we say something is kind and not hurtful.

Jesus said in **Luke 6:38**, Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

What principle rule of life is He talking about? So often, how we treat others comes back to us. When we are kind, others will usually be kind to us. It works the other way too. If you are cruel to others, then others will be cruel to you too.

Of course, it does not always happen that way. Remember how people treated Jesus! But in the end, how we are treated does not really matter. Why? Because as Christians, we always should be kind, even if that kindness is not given back to us. In fact, being kind to those who are unkind to us is the best example of being a true follower of Jesus. How we treat others will influence how others treat us.

Matthew 7:12 says, So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

It always is easy to be kind to someone who could help you. Anyone will do that! But it is much harder to be kind to those who can never do anything for you in return. That is the real test.

So often, we hear people proclaim, "Get yours first!", "Hurt others before the hurt you.", and "Only look out for yourself." These attitudes are rampant throughout society, and they rub off on

our children. What we need to teach them is how to be kind, and to think of the needs of others.

Jesus taught that our activities reveal our character to others. If we are being transformed into the image of Christ, His character sweetens ours like honey and His kindness becomes our activities of love carried out in the mundane and seemingly trivial events of our lives.

Look closely at what Jesus said in Luke 6:35. 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 children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

Loving people, particularly our enemies, is not an easy thing. But in case you're tempted to say, "I don't have any enemies" I encourage you to think about those people in your life who frustrate you, disappoint, annoy, or just don't "get" you. And then there are those who aspire after the same things that you do. If you're honest with yourself, when you think about "enemies" this way, you will probably identify at least a few "enemies" of your emotional programs for happiness.

No, we do not "do good" to others expecting anything in return, not a thank you, acceptance, a payback, or anything else! There is nothing being transacted here, nothing bartered or exchanged, no "pound of flesh" bought or sold, no IOU's owing or owed. We just respond to them in a way that reflects God's love because we love Him and are learning to love others His way.

Kindness seems rather self-explanatory when you look at it from the eyes of Jesus, doesn't it? In love it should be a fruit we have and produce!

Lesson on **Goodness**

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, **goodness**, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

In the bible, “goodness” or being good, means showing right behavior. But it also means avoiding evil. Goodness is holiness in action.

Ephesians 2:10, For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Goodness is what we do. If not, it is not “goodness” at all. The word translated “goodness,” agathosune, in **Galatians 5:22** shows an active goodness. It is more than just having good character. It is character that shows itself in good deeds, actions.

We often hear that someone has a “good heart” or that someone is a “good soul.” In the Bible, it may be difficult to describe what is good. We are all sinners. **Jeremiah 17:9** says, The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? And better yet **Romans 3:23** say, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

It is even more difficult to describe in real life a “good heart” or a “good soul” itself means nothing. Instead, a “good heart” is shown in good actions and good deeds that benefit others Good thoughts and good reasons are fine. But goodness really means doing good. We only fool ourselves if we think differently.

In the Bible the deepest sense of “good” begins with God alone. The word good often is used in many examples. There may be good and bad individuals. **Matthew 5:45** says, He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. It may be possible for Christians to do good works. **Ephesians 2:10** says, For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Everything that God created He said was very “good.” We read in **Genesis 1:31**, God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

But Jesus announces that God alone is “good” in **Mark 10:18**. Only God’s goodness is perfect. **Romans 8:28** tell us about how the goodness of God can be shown in our lives? It says, And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

God does not just tell us He is good, He has shown goodness to us in many ways. We can find the goodness and love of God in creation. The world is full of sin. There is sickness, disease, and bad things that happen in nature. But even so, the goodness of God still is shown in nature.

Think of human relationships, love, and caring for other people. We can have these wonderful and good things only because God created us to do good for people. And He did so because He is good.

One of the sad facts of life is people are not always what they seem on the outside. There can be some very gifted and talented people, people with beautiful and positive personalities, people of great skill and wisdom. We often call them “good.” But, in fact, they are very rotten. The word good can, like the

word love, be so commonly used that it loses its true meaning. When we keep the idea of God's goodness with us all the time, we much better can understand what human goodness really is.

Often we hear non-Christians say that they do not understand this Christian talk about humans being bad. They wonder, are there not people who do good things, who show kindness, selflessness, and unconditional love? Have we all not known people who are like that? How would you answer this kind of argument?

As human beings, we are sinners. We have broken God's law. We all need a Savior. But at the same time, we have received promises in the Bible that if we surrender to Jesus and live in the Spirit, we can overcome and live a life that shows the goodness of God. We can live in what Paul calls the "newness of life." **Romans 6:4** says, We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

We have been by faith "buried with" Christ "by baptism into death." For this reason we can "consider" ourselves "to be dead as far as sin is concerned, now that we believe in Christ Jesus, consider ourselves to be alive as far as God is concerned."

We can be "good" according to the Bible. Not "good" as if we deserve salvation but "good" because our hearts, our reasons, our actions show the world that God is real in our lives. Sure, we need to die to self, but we need to be willing to serve others. We also will need to struggle daily with the flesh. And it will take a humble heart of true sorrow and repentance when we fail. But we can and must live out the faith that we claim to have.

It is not uncommon for those who face pain and hardship in this life to doubt the goodness of God. But the clear message of Scripture is that God is uniquely good, and that He is the measure for everything we call good. Considered together with His wisdom and power, Christians can be assured that God not only desires to reveal His goodness, but is able to accomplish His good plan in the best possible way.

That is goodness and that is how God looks down upon humanity. He doesn't blame us. He doesn't hold our failures or faults against us. He looked over the list of names marked guilty by the enemy and sent His own Son to save everyone who would receive His free gift. **Romans 2:4** says, "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"

It is His goodness that we are contending to see. His Majesty. Keep your eyes and your heart open to receive a new glimpse of who God really is. Tell your heart not to lose hope, but to press in for greater revelation. David said in **Psalms 27:13**, "I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

When Moses wanted to see God's glory, God responded by saying, "I will make all My Goodness pass before you." in **Exodus 33:19**. In **Psalms 31:19** David said, "Oh, how great is Your goodness which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men." God's goodness waits to be revealed to His people to move them to a higher place of trust.

Goodness is something we must devote ourselves to. We must cultivate it because, coming out of this present evil world, we have not been schooled in doing good. It is not part of our character. We have been schooled in being self-centered, and self-centered people cannot do godly good.

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord because our Father is good, **Psalms 33:5**. He is creating us in His image and drawing out of us His own goodness to witness that He is our God and to make us ready for His Kingdom. He has given gifts to all of His children to serve Him and His church. We need to take every opportunity to yield to His Spirit for this purpose and labor to develop the goodness that is its fruit.

Lesson on **Faithfulness**

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, **faithfulness**, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Paul lists nineteen characteristics, with "lovers of themselves" and "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" serving as bookends containing the others within them. How can a person be faithful to God when he loves himself more than God? How can a person be faithful to God when his own gratification means more to him than pleasing God? How can a person be faithful if he is a headstrong, haughty slanderer and traitor who is disobedient to parents, greedy, unloving and without self-control?

If any term catches the essence of mankind's character at the end of the age, it is "faithlessness." Man is generally faithless to any standard that can be considered as truly godly. In **2 Timothy 3:1-5**, the apostle Paul describes the spirit of people at the end of the age,

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

Faithfulness hinges upon what we value as important combined with commitment. Humans have a powerful tendency to be faithful to what they think is truly important, be it a family name, spouse, friendship, employer, school, athletic team or even certain things like a make of automobile.

This tendency was an issue when the disciples decided to follow Peter's lead and return to their fishing trade after Jesus' death and resurrection. In **John 21:15-17**, Jesus pointedly asks Peter three times whether he loved Him. The first time He asks whether he loved Him "more than these," referring either to his fellow apostles or the tools of his fishing trade. The inference is inescapable, Jesus wanted Peter to hold Him of greater importance than anything on earth. Considering Peter's weighty responsibility, he could not be faithful to Jesus without the staunchest commitment to Him as most important of all in his life.

The meaning to us is clear. We must love Christ supremely, or we do not love Him much if at all. If we are not willing to give up all earthly possessions, forsake all earthly friends, and obey Him above all others, including our own carnal desires, to be faithful to Him, our attachment to Him is tenuous at best. Is such a proposition too much? Does not marriage require a similar faithfulness from each spouse? Without it, it is no wonder there is so much adultery and divorce.

Holding true to the course God has laid before us is difficult amid this world's many alluring distractions clamoring for our time and attention. This world is attractive to human nature and bids us to expend our energies in self-satisfaction. Jesus warns all who take up their cross that the way is difficult and narrow, requiring a great deal of vision and discipline to be faithful to His cause. Some have completed the course. Those who held God and His way in the highest esteem in their lives are awaiting those of us traveling the path now. Will we be faithful as they were?

The apostle Paul writes in **2 Timothy 3:13**, that "evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." People today are no different from when Moses wrote the Pentateuch or

Paul his epistles, but the occasion to sin, the incentive to do so and thus sin's frequency and intensity are at their highest levels since just before the Flood. In other words, the environment to commit sin more easily grows ever more amenable, and human nature is taking advantage of it. We have been born into, indeed have unwittingly contributed to creating, an environment in which it is exceedingly difficult to remain faithful.

We live in a world in which self-centeredness is being promoted to its greatest extent in human history. Appealing advertising hammers away at us to gratify ourselves: Why wait, why deny ourselves, why sacrifice, why not go along with everyone else? Constantly we hear, "Indulge yourself because you deserve it."

This world always appeals to moral and ethical standards lower than those of the great God and His way of life. In Technicolor with emotion-stirring music, Hollywood "sells" adultery and fornication as acceptable as long as the couple involved are attractive and somehow oppressed—thus "deserving" of a "better" relationship.

War, murder, lying, stealing, coveting, Sabbath-breaking and idolatry are acts that almost everyone in the world would claim as being wrong, yet most unwittingly commit them to some degree and promote them in our culture. They justify their sin because everybody else is doing it, and they see no good reason why they should not just go along. If they try to swim against the tide, they think they will be taken advantage of.

Not too long ago, a person's word was his bond, and mere handshakes sealed major business agreements. Tales of Abraham Lincoln's honesty over pennies are an almost legendary part of our nation's history. Historians say that faithfulness was such a hallmark of the Roman Republic that not one divorce occurred in its first seven hundred years! But in the last fifty years this nation has seen a calamitous, family-destroying rise in the divorce rate that threatens the very stability of society. Faithlessness is playing a major role in this destruction. People are without natural affection and traitors to their marital contract. Child abuse is becoming ever more prevalent. Athletes seem to break contracts almost at will. Manufacturers lie about the quality of their products, and workers fudge in the quality of their work.

Faithlessness is rising to its peak because self-centeredness, the father of irresponsibility, is being promoted to its utmost. It is the spirit of this age, but we have cause to resist it by what God has offered us in His revelation. God-centeredness in our lives is the answer to faithlessness and irresponsibility. But God-centeredness is not cheap, and few are willing to pay the price: their lives!

As with all the fruit of the Spirit, God Himself is the model we must study for examples of faithfulness to encourage us to trust and to emulate Him. The faithfulness of God is a familiar phrase to those of a religious mind, but its depth and scope are probably not as familiar. God's faithfulness seems to have been a favorite subject of Paul's. He writes of it in his first epistle 1 Thessalonians and again in what may have been his last 2 Timothy. Paul had proved it in a thousand dangers and struggles, he found that, when all was said and done, God had never failed him.

When we speak of one another as faithful, we mean that we adhere to our word, that we keep faith with men and that we discharge the obligations of our office or position. Because of these things, we are trustworthy. It is much the same when we think and speak of God's faithfulness.

Paul writes in **Romans 5:1-2**, Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we

stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

One can justifiably say that this expression of God's faithfulness is the pivot upon which turns His whole purpose for humanity. God calls and then through His goodness leads us to repentance as it says in **Romans 2:4**. **1 John 1:9** then adds, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Since Christ has come and died that we might be pardoned and cleansed, God's faithfulness is part of His grace. He would not be faithful to His promises, His past acts in Christ's works, or His calling that has sounded in our ears unless, when we obeyed the call and confessed, He allowed us to enter into the full possession of His pardoning grace. In other words, our forgiveness and cleansing, the receiving of favor from Him, is a product of His faithfulness.

God's faithfulness in these areas has far-reaching, practical ramifications for us. That God is faithful means that His character is unchangingly consistent. The unalterable structure of the universe consists of both justice and forgiveness. God never acts in contradiction of Himself, and in all experiences we may depend on Him to be unalterably just and forgiving toward us. Because He is. Could we trust a god if we faithful, He can be the central and most important object of our faith were never sure what he would do?

What is the attitude, or what qualities in us should correspond to the faithfulness of God? Paul writes in **Hebrews 10:23**, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." Holding fast is the first indication of faithfulness, but our understanding increases when we know the word translated "faithful" is the same word translated "faithfulness" in **Galatians 5:22**. It is understood as "reliable" or "trustworthy" rather than "fidelity" because it is being fully convicted of the truth of God that engenders loyalty and dependability. Faith in God corresponds to God's faithfulness. As with two tuning forks of the same pitch, when one is struck, the other responds by vibrating also. God's faithfulness should awaken faith in us, so we can respond in submissive obedience. If He is worth trusting, we should trust Him.

Since God is faithful, it has become our responsibility to imitate Him in being faithful by committing our lives to well doing. In **2 Corinthians 1:17-19**, Paul demonstrates from his own life what this means, Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me, there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No? But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, by me, Silvanus, and Timothy, was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes.

Because God is faithful, the strength to be faithful is promised to us. **Hebrews 4:16** assures us, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Forgiveness, access to His throne, and the promises of His Spirit and that no trial will be greater than we can bear, combined with His declaration that He works in us both to will and to do, assure us that this fruit of the Spirit can be produced in us when we yield as faithful servants.

Lesson on **Gentleness**

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **gentleness**, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Number eight in the list of the fruit of the Spirit is gentleness or in some versions meekness. What is the quality of meekness or gentleness? Certainly in the biblical sense it is not weakness, nor is it self-debasing or a belittling of oneself.

There are two stories about George Washington that have impressed me as illustrations of at least one aspect of biblical meekness or gentleness. The stories may be apocryphal, but they picture him as not only a gentleman but also a gentle man. On one occasion, he was fox hunting with a group of friends. One of the fields through which they were passing was bordered by a stone wall. As his horse jumped the wall it knocked off a stone. Washington immediately stopped, got down from his horse, and replaced the stone. One of his friends said, "You are too big a man to bother with that." He replied gently, "No, I am just the right size."

Another story tells of a corporal at Valley Forge who was directing three men as they tried to lift a log into place. It was too heavy, but the corporal commanded again and again, "All right, men, one, two, three, lift!" A man in an overcoat came by and said to the corporal, "Why don't you help them?" The corporal pulled himself up to full height and replied, "Sir, I am a corporal." Without a word the man stepped over and with his help the log went easily into place. The man was George Washington.

Gentleness includes true humility that does not consider itself too good or too exalted for humble tasks. Another illustration I like. A guide was taking a group of visitors through a factory. One of the things he showed them was a giant steam hammer capable of flattening an automobile. Then the guide put down a walnut and had the hammer break the shell without hurting the meat of the nut. What an illustration of gentleness as power under perfect control! That gets close to the biblical meaning.

The NIV lists gentleness as the fifth fruit of the Spirit. In today's English the meaning is better expressed by the word "kindness." The eighth fruit that we are dealing with in this lesson is translated "meekness" in the King James Version. However, it is translated "gentleness" in most of the newer English versions. This is not a matter of any difference in the ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. The Greek word *prautesis* found in them all.

The problem here is that the English language has changed since the days of King James and Shakespeare. The common dictionary definition of meekness as it is used today is "deficient in spirit and courage." That is a far cry from the meaning of the Greek word.

Webster's Dictionary does give an older meaning for meekness as "enduring injury with patience and without resentment." That might not be too far from the meaning of the biblical word, but the Greek is much more positive. It has the meaning of sweetness, mildness, gentleness, and good nature. Gentleness is never self-important but is considerate, courteous, and modest, yet willing to try when a job needs to be done. In some versions of the Bible it is defined as restraint coupled with strength and courage.

Aristotle gave its classic definition as halfway between excessive anger and indifference. That is, he felt the gentle person could be angry at the right time and submissive at the right time. The classical Greek also used it of animals that were powerful, yet tamed and under control. My Greek lexicon includes the meanings of humility, courtesy, and considerateness.

To try to understand gentleness further, let us go through the passages in the Bible where the Greek word *prautes* is used. In the Old Testament the Septuagint uses it once in **Psalms 45:3-4**. The Psalmist calls on God, Gird your sword on your side, you mighty one; clothe yourself with splendor and majesty. In your majesty ride forth victoriously in the cause of truth, humility and justice; let your right hand achieve awesome deeds.

Obviously, gentleness is not weakness. It is not allowing yourself to become a doormat. It is part of God's character as He moves triumphantly in mighty power and victory.

In **1 Corinthians 4:21**, Paul is dealing with arrogant people and says, What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit? Paul had a tremendous love for the believers in all the churches, but his love was not mere blind sentimentality. He knew they sometimes needed discipline, and he "was prepared to exercise it." But he wanted to see them respond in repentance so he could show them the love and gentleness that was in his heart toward them.

In **2 Corinthians 10:1**, Paul appeals to them by the meekness, gentleness, Greek, *prautes*, and gentleness, sweet reasonableness, Greek, *epieikeias*, of Christ. Then he goes on to talk about the weapons we fight with that are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to tear down strongholds. We are not carried away by rage, personal vindictiveness, greed, or pride as we seek victories for Christ. But with the gentleness of Christ we can triumph powerfully.

In **Galatians 6:1**, Paul tells us that if a man is trapped in some sin, those who are spiritual should restore him gently. Problems arise where even the best of us may slip up, just as one might slip on an icy or dangerous path. If we are truly filled with the Spirit we will show gentleness, not hardness, not condemnation, as we try to restore such a person.

In **Ephesians 4:2**, where Paul is urging us to live a life worthy of the calling we have received, he calls on us to be "completely humble and gentle." We are to be free from self-exaltation and fully submitted to the will of God both in our relation to Him and in our relationships with others.

In **Colossians 3:12**, Paul urges us "as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved," to clothe ourselves "with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." This shows that the fruit of the Spirit needs our cooperation for its development.

Some have said, "Don't worry about the fruit. Just bask in the sunlight of His love, enjoy the rain of His blessing, and the fruit will automatically appear." But it does not work that way. We have to put to death the works of the flesh. We have to take to ourselves the fruit of the Spirit and exercise our faith to develop them.

In **2 Timothy 2:25**, Paul tells the Lord's servant that those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will give them a change of heart, leading them to the knowledge of the truth. That is, he must keep on patiently and gently teaching.

In **Titus 3:2**, Paul instructs Titus to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable, that is, not quarrelsome, to be considerate, and to show true humble gentleness toward everyone. It includes the idea of springing to the help of those in need, yet keeping our own feelings under control.

James 1:21 commands us to get rid of all filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and with a humble gentleness accept the word planted in us, which can save us. And **James 3:13** asks, Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility [Greek, *prautes*, ‘humble gentleness’] that comes from wisdom.

And finally, in **1 Peter 3:15-16**, we are told to be prepared to answer everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope we have. But we are to do this “with gentleness and respect.” Someone has pointed out that courage is not in Paul’s list of the fruit of the Spirit. But we should recognize that it takes courage to be gentle in the midst of all the evil surrounding us in this world. It took courage for Paul to stand against the party spirit that had developed in Corinth and that had become almost vicious.

Gentleness is never a false modesty, a self-depreciation, or a spineless refusal to stand for anything. Gentleness is never a cowardly retreat from reality, which substitutes a passive selfishness for real gentleness and avoids trouble in ways that allow even greater trouble to develop. Neither is it a false humility that refuses to recognize God has given us talents and abilities or that refuses to use them for His glory.

The Bible says Moses excelled in the meekness that is gentleness in **Numbers 12:3**. God gave him a high position. It is hard for the natural man to be gentle toward those who attack him, especially if they attack his official rank and honor. But Moses did not try to defend himself. He was gentle toward Miriam and Aaron and let God take care of the situation. Gentleness includes the idea that we do not care about what happens to our honor as much as what happens to God’s honor and what happens to others.

In our daily lives we cannot help coming into situations that bring conflicts with people. It is easy for us in the natural to react with violence or anger, especially if we feel insecure in our position. But when we accept the reality of who we are in Christ and trust the Holy Spirit to help us, we can be gentle, whatever conflicts may arise.

Jesus showed true gentleness both in the midst of conflict and in the midst of popularity. His healings and miracles often brought the crowds to a high pitch of enthusiasm. But He refused to let them make Him the kind of king they wanted. He reminded them of the passage in **Isaiah 42:1–4**, “Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.”

Jesus knew who He was, but He was gentle and humble, quite a contrast to the lying teachers who today exalt themselves by noisy demonstrations and who too often begin to think of themselves as above the requirements of holiness and justice. Jesus’ awareness of His power enabled Him to be gentle to those in need. The broken reed He would not crush but would fully restore. The flickering wick of a lamp He would not put out but would cause it to burn brightly again. His gentleness works. It brings forth righteousness, and it will bring forth justice in the earth, He gently takes the sinner and makes him whole.

May we cultivate that fruit of the Spirit which gives all the glory to God and shows a gentleness that is powerful and demonstrates the high, holy, faithful love of God!

Lesson on **Self-Control**

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, **self-control**. Against such there is no law.

Last on the list we have self-control. This is a subject you could go nuts with. It can reach into every aspect of life. Self-control can be simply defined as the mastery of oneself, the capacity of individuals to so restrain their own emotions, desires, and impulses that they can serve others. The lack of such control in our culture, be it related to chemical abuse, overeating, or a host of other unhealthy behaviors, should concern every Christian, indeed every congregation of believers who wish to be a lighthouse of God's grace to those who are "out of control."

In looking at Galatians 5:22-23 it quickly becomes evident that by reserving the mention of self-control to last, the apostle Paul is deliberately emphasizing it as the capstone of all the graces of the Spirit. While the fruits reflect the maturing work of the Spirit in an individual's life, they also become apparent in relationships with other people.

To begin, let us examine what self-control is not. Consider the cowboy in a TV Western who has been shot. Lacking adequate medical care or even the presence of a doctor, a friend takes his knife to cut the bullet out of the person's body. Knowing that this will be painful, he gives the victim a stick to hold between his teeth to help him keep from screaming and losing self-control. The image is one of grim determination and resolution to the fateful pain.

Fortunately, this does not depict the concept of self-control Paul discusses. The biblical understanding of the term requires crucifixion of the sinful or lower nature by divine grace as we surrender ourselves to the Lord. In **Galatians 5:19–21**, Paul contrasts the sanctified life with characteristics of the old life: "sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness and orgies, and the like." All these categories reflect behaviors that are out of control and were common in New Testament times.

Living the overcoming Christian life was no small problem for many in the congregations to whom Paul wrote. Yielding to sinful passions was the order of the day. Believers who did not come from a Jewish background, where the precepts of the Old Testament were rigorously followed probably found the level of personal restraint required of a Christian especially difficult to sustain. The self-control, however, which derives from the presence of the Spirit in our thoughts and emotions, is undergirded by the power of God as believers yield themselves to the Lord in obedience to His will. Consider also **Romans 12:2** where Paul refers to the transformation of the mind.

Several verses help us understand this better;

Galatians 5:16, So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Philippians 2:13, For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Romans 8:9, You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

Self-control enables the believer to overcome sinful and destructive habits, focus on ministering to others, build up the body of Christ, and live in mutual submission to others, thereby leading a life that

is positive and productive in the family, the neighborhood, the church, and place of employment. For example, Paul exhorted the Ephesian churches in **Ephesians 4:28**, He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

In **Galatians 5:13-14** he wrote, You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

The Christian should not assume maintaining self-control to be a purely individual matter. It is vital to recognize that ministry within the body of Christ entails responsibility to help others. Notice the corporate emphasis in each of the following passages of Scripture.

Galatians 6:1, Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. **Galatians 6:10**, Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

1 Corinthians 12:26, If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Ephesians 4:15-16, Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Philippians 4:2-3, I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel.

The gathering of early Christians in house churches offered ample opportunities for small groups of believers to encourage each other in their spiritual walk. Christians today struggle as well to gain control of various aspects of their lives. Through members ministering to one another, however, the body of Christ builds itself up in love as each person becomes more mature in character and behavior.

In practical ways that are easy to implement, healing for emotional and mental ailments that cause people to lose control of their reactions to problems can occur in a variety of church contexts, Bible study and prayer groups, Sunday school classes, Wednesday night gatherings, and many more. A Sunday school class that encourages broad participation, provides opportunities for sharing, and offers prayer and counsel on threatening issues can become a valuable "support group" for hurting people.

Spiritual and practical counsel offered in love can help a believer respond maturely and properly with the divine assistance of the Holy Spirit.

In church on Sunday, when requests are taken for prayer, several needs are always mentioned. In this way, we learn about the hurts of others and prayerfully ask for the Lord's intervention. Through this rather simple means, we help one another overcome fears and discover anew the abiding grace of God.

Bible study and discussion afford us insights into how believers should react to crisis situations or vexing daily problems.

In this life, no one achieves all the fruit of the Spirit equally. Some speculate that Paul might have lost control of his temper when he had a “sharp disagreement” with Barnabas over whether to invite John Mark to join them for another missionary journey in **Acts 15:36–41**. In regard to gaining perfection in this life, he wrote to the Philippian believers in **Philippians 3:12**, Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

The Spirit of Christ who works in our hearts to help us live above sinful practices, as well as the offering of loving counsel by Christian brothers and sisters, enables the fruit of self-control to grow for the glory of God. As a result, we can model God’s values, demonstrate in our behaviors His power to aid us daily, and more effectively share His love for others.

Little wonder that human relationships become the battleground for demonstrating the level of Christian graces and self-control. After all, Jesus himself said in **John 13:35**, By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

Every skill has to be practiced. Self-control doesn’t come in a day. It comes in hits and misses, in successes and failures, as we try to practice it day after day. As Paul said in **1 Timothy 6:12**, Fight the good fight of faith.

Don’t constantly put yourself in places where your weaknesses will be tested, where your most difficult to control drives will be out on the firing line of temptation. We must avoid even the appearance of evil. **1 Thessalonians 5:22**, But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

In Closing:

Christ lived out these traits in His everyday life, and we are to strive to do the same as we spiritually mature. Believers are not able to live out each trait without staying connected to Christ. Our flesh will fail us, and we will fall short in our attempts. We must rely on the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit to help us live out each fruit with courage, conviction, and boldness. Each fruit is produced, nurtured, and developed over time. In order to live out each fruit consistently, we must continue to surrender our desires to God's will and trust Him. As we grow and continue to imitate Christ's nature, we will activate and strengthen living out the fruit of the Spirit each day. The fruit of the Spirit is not an outdated list of traits, but are active, necessary, and relevant today. In a world where instant success and ambition often reign supreme, it is essential that we continue to live out each fruit of the Spirit with boldness and conviction.

Living out each fruit of the Spirit is not a legalistic command by God, but an open invitation for us to choose differently, represent God better, develop stronger character, strengthen our attitudes, and restore hope in a broken world. When we fall short within our own strength, it is God's Holy Spirit that we must rely on for encouragement and strength to start anew. Whether it is love, joy, peace, patience, forbearance, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, or self-control, we all have an opportunity to live out the positive traits of Christ each day.

The fruit we bear will be a witness to the world that the god we serve is faithful .