

Welcome to BNEXT

I am excited to share this journey through God's Word with you. As we study Scripture, we see an unfolding revelation of who God is, the nature of Jesus, and how we can become stronger in our walk with Christ. It is important that we study Scripture for ourselves — allowing the Holy Spirit to enlighten us (Acts 17:11).

The Scripture covered by each lesson is listed on the top-right side of the masthead of the page. Read the Scripture passages and then begin working your way through the lesson. Each lesson in this series contains three pages of commentary, followed by three pages of questions that will assist you to dig deeper and reflect on God's Word.

We have also included a Leader's Guide that will enable anyone to facilitate a small group. Once you have completed this BNEXT study, I hope you will consider leading others through this material — whether it is a group of friends, your church, or as a ministry outreach. (See the Leader's Guide at the end of this study for more information.)

Again, thank you for allowing me to share this amazing journey with you.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,

Handwritten signature of William P. Campbell in blue ink.

William P. Campbell

Founder & President | Scripture Awakening

BNEXT Participant's Guide

Thank you for choosing BNEXT Bible study curriculum. To help you get the most out of your study, please take a few minutes to read this information before you begin. Studying the Bible is much like going on a journey — it takes us to new places in our understanding and our walk with God. The Word of God is transformative — it's living and active, can build up our faith, and call us to move beyond where we are.

Using this curriculum, you may journey alone, or travel with others in a small group, or even engage as an entire congregation (with small groups as part of the program). Groups gather once a week to review what was read, to share answers to discussion questions, and to deepen their understanding.

About This Study

This electronic version of the Participant's Guide contains the same material as the printed version. It allows you to electronically record your answers to the questions which are part of each lesson. Following each question, you will find a blue text box. Click or touch the box and the field within it will turn white allowing you to type in your answer. Your answer will automatically be saved when you exit the text box. Should you need more space for your answer, the text box will automatically expand and insert a scroll bar on the right-hand side.

Things to Know

These studies are designed to be used in many different settings— individuals, congregations (separating into small groups), Sunday school classes, prison ministries, military, business groups— virtually anywhere a small group can be formed. Experience has shown that participants find the small group experience to be greatly beneficial. The input and interaction with others will broaden your perspective and stimulate your thinking about Scripture.

The lessons are designed to be done throughout the week. Each lesson contains a few pages of commentary, followed by study questions. There are three types of questions: Devotion (Personal Questions), Discussion (Small Group), and Digging Deeper (Further Study). While participants may use any Bible translation they prefer, all of the Biblical quotations in BNEXT studies are from the New International Version (NIV).

Plan your daily reading. The Scripture readings are located on the right side of the masthead of each lesson. Some lessons may cover a few chapters of a book (such as Genesis 1-11 in the series, *In the Beginning*). Longer readings may be broken down into more manageable daily readings, which may take some thoughtful planning. Some readings are as short as a few verses and will not present any difficulties. Some topical studies do not have assigned Scripture readings.

If you are meeting in a small group, be sure to first read and complete the lesson before the gathering. Once a week, your group will meet to spend time (about an hour) discussing the lesson and sharing personal insights.

More of our resources and study aids can be found at ScriptureAwakening.com. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments at info@scriptureawakening.com.



I am the vine; you are the branches... apart from Me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

Introduction

Spirituality is a hot topic. Many, who will not admit to being religious, are willing to say they are “spiritual.” But what does that really mean? The word “spiritual” can be used to mean almost anything a person wants and in the end may make very little difference in the way a person lives.

Within the Christian church in the last 50 years or so, there have been some more specific and biblically based explorations of spirituality. Spiritual gifts, for a number of years, were a preoccupation in a number of churches. Then spiritual disciplines generated a good deal of interest. However, God's people need to pay attention to the often neglected spiritual dimension — the Fruit of the Spirit.

The apostle Paul writes about the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control” (Galatians 5:22-23). This list makes spirituality very personal and practical. How many of us would like these words to describe the way we live!

The Necessity of Spiritual Fruit

Paul's listing of the Fruit of the Spirit comes at the conclusion of his letter to the Galatians and it only makes sense when they are set in context. The Church is the spiritual greenhouse in which God grows us. Everything grows in a greenhouse, weeds as well a fruit. The Galatian church was a young church and its growth was a tangle of weeds and fruit—with doctrinal confusion and personal conflicts, as well as spiritual vitality and passion.

Paul writes to help them untangle themselves. Galatians 1-4, he addresses the new life in Christ that comes, not from keeping the Jewish Law, but through faith in Christ. In chapter 5 of the letter to the Galatians, Paul gets practical. He warns them about the consequences of their confusion and conflicts: “If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other” (Galatians 5:15).

Having warned them about their destructive behavior, he tells them what to do about it. Their relational conflicts were due to an inner conflict that is inherent in the Christian: “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They were in conflict with each other...” (Galatians 5:17-18).

One is not a Christian for very long before running into this inner conflict. Someone offends us and our first response is to be angry and perhaps strike out. Then, we feel badly about it because we know in the back of our minds that God wants us to be patient and forgiving. Or perhaps, we spend a lot of time and energy on a project that helps lots of people, and we feel really good about our contribution. However, when praise and recognition are handed out, most of the credit goes to someone else. We know that a spiritually mature Christian response is to take the back seat, but what we feel is resentment and indignation. Within the church, our families, and our employment, we are always running into this conflict. Outwardly, the conflict may not express itself in unpleasant words and open hostility. But inwardly, there is a tension between

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Philippians 2:3

doing what we really want to do in the name of Christ, and what we actually do much of the time, which is looking out for number 1. Expressing his own frustration about this inner tension within ourselves as Christians, Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24).

The Problem with Will Power

A common approach to this conflict, one that is unproductive, is through will power. Richard Foster observes that, “Our ordinary method of dealing with ingrained sin is to launch a frontal attack. We rely on our will power and determination. Whatever the issue for us may be—anger, bitterness, gluttony, pride, sexual lust, alcohol, fear—we determine never to do it again; we pray against it, fight against it, set our will against it. But it is all in vain...” (*Celebration of Discipline*, p. 4). How many of us have made repeated resolutions for better behavior only to find out that we have done it again. In the most extreme cases, that of an alcohol or a drug addict, the consequences of repeated failure are destructively obvious. For many others, the repeated failure means that there is a quiet underlying tension within us that poisons our social environment and leaves us with a sense of frustration or despair.

Passion Fruit

In facing this inner conflict we come to the heart of Christian spirituality. From his own experience, Paul writes of a better way to deal with the conflict of our sinful nature and our spiritual nature. First, the good news is that those who belong to Christ are not under a set of rules/laws that condemn if you fail to keep them (Galatians 5:18). In fact Paul states elsewhere “...there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). This means that we don't need to spend time beating ourselves when we blow it. God doesn't condemn us, nor should we condemn ourselves. Second, Paul says that those who belong to Christ have crucified their old nature (Galatians 5:24). This means that no matter how bad things appear outwardly, the deepest truth about us is that the old sinful nature is bound to lose. Third, in the depth of our being, we now have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us, and if we have the Spirit of Christ within us, then we can choose to live in harmony with the desires of the Spirit.

Jonathan Edwards was leader of the “First Great Awakening” in the American Colonies in the 18th Century. During his time, there was a great outpouring of the Spirit that also generated significant growth in fruit along with a great tangle of spiritual weeds. In his book, *Religious Affections*, he writes that it is affections/desires, not the will, which are the spring of our actions. He observes that nothing ever happens in the world apart from a strong desire. For instance, it is the desire for a healthy body that leads to exercise and healthy eating, not merely our willful determination. Likewise, it is the strength of our desire for godly behavior that will make the difference in the handling of the inner conflict of our spiritual nature.

Putting all this together (the teaching of the apostle Paul and the reflections of Jonathan Edwards) we could say that the Fruit of the Spirit comes from spiritual passions and desires.

The more we desire to live in a way that is pleasing to the Spirit, the more we can expect to see the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives. For the next 9 weeks, we are going to look at each of the fruit



Whatever happens
conduct yourselves in a
manner worthy of the
Gospel of Christ.

Philippians 1:27a

listed by the Apostle Paul. Our expectation is that as we see how “tasty” each is the more we will desire to see it come out from the depths of our hearts into all the circumstances of our lives.

Spending Time With God

This 10 week study series, “The Fruit of the Spirit,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about the Fruit of the Spirit for which you are especially thankful to God. Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. The Church (the body of Christ) is the greenhouse of God in which He grows His people. How have you experienced spiritual growth as a member of the Church?

3. Take a few moments and write a brief prayer thanking God for the ways in which He has worked in your life through the church.



SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 1

Prepare to Bear Fruit | Galatians 5:16-26

4. The church is also a place of spiritual conflict in which there is disappointment and tension. How have you experienced this?

8. How have you experienced this conflict in your own life?

5. Take a few moments to lay those hurts before God. Write a brief prayer asking God to heal your heart.

9. In what ways have you attempted to deal with it?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.

10. Paul writes that our inner tension is one of conflicting desires (Galatians 5:17). What is “desirable” about living by the sinful nature?

7. Read Galatians 5:16-18. The Apostle Paul says that there is a conflict between the sinful nature and the Spirit. He writes of his own dealing with the conflict in Romans 7:14-25. What does he have to say about it?

11. What is desirable about living according to our spiritual nature?



12. Paul writes of the “works or acts” of the sinful nature in Galatians 5:19 and the “Fruit of the Spirit” in 5:22-23. What different images are conveyed by work/acts versus fruit?

15. Within the church, there are those whose fruit-bearing brings a good taste. Who comes to mind in your experience who has “tasted good” to you?

13. How might the listing of the works/acts of the sinful nature help to inspire a desire to grow in the Fruit of the Spirit?

16. How would your church be enriched if you became spiritually fruitful?

14. How do you respond as you read over the list of the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

17. Paul lists works or acts of the flesh as they were prominent in the classical pagan world of his day. How do they compare with the acts of the sinful nature in our day and time?

18. If Paul were writing today, what other works/acts might he mention?



SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 1

Prepare to Bear Fruit | Galatians 5:16-26

19. Paul writes of “being lead by the Spirit” Galatians 5:18, “the fruit of the Spirit” 5:22-23, “living by the Spirit” 5:16, 25, and “keeping in step with the Spirit” 5:25. From these passages consider, what is the Spirit’s role and what is our role in living spiritually?

21. Jesus also spoke about fruit in John 15:1-8. What further insights do you gain into bearing spiritual fruit?

20. Jesus spoke about the importance of fruit. Please read Matthew 7:15-20 and summarize in your own words what He has to say.

Use the table below to look up verses on each of the fruit of the Spirit. Adapted from Zondervan Bible Commentary.

Fruit	Definition	Scripture
Love	sacrificial, unmerited deeds	Exodus 34:6; John 3:16;13:34-35; Romans 5:8; 12:9-10; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 4:7-8, 11-12,16,21
Joy	inner happiness independent of outward circumstances	Deuteronomy 12:7,12,18; Psalm 64:10; 104:31; Isaiah 25:9; 62:5; Luke 15:7; Philippians 4:4; 1 Peter 1:8
Peace	harmony in all relationships	Isaiah 9:6-7;26:3; Ezekiel 34:25; John 14:27; Romans 5:1,12; 18;14:17; Ephesians 2:14-17; Hebrews 13:20
Patience	putting up with others, even when one is severely tried	Romans 9:22; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 1:11; 1 Timothy 1:16; Hebrews 6:12; James 5:7-8,10; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 3:9;15
Kindness	doing thoughtful deeds for others	Romans 2:4; 11:22; 1 Corinthians 13:4; Ephesians 2:7; 4:32; Colossians 3:12; Titus 3:4
Goodness	showing generosity to others	Nehemiah 9:25, 35; Psalm 31:19; Mark 10:18; Romans 15:14; Ephesians 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:11
Faithfulness	trustworthiness and reliability	Psalm 33:4; Luke 16:10-12; 1 Corinthians 1:9,10:13; 2Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Timothy 4:7; Titus 2:10; Hebrews 10:23
Gentleness	meekness and humility	Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 11:29; 5:5; Ephesians 4:2



But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Galatians 5:22

Introduction

Love is the first on the list of the Fruit of the Spirit. Instinctively we know this is right. The wisdom of the ages says that love is the most important thing in life. Looking into our own hearts, we know that our deepest longings have to do with love. So it's good to read that when the Spirit of Christ dwells within us, we should expect that love would be the first flavor of the Spirit that grows from our new hearts.

What is troubling about Paul's first words on the Fruit of the Spirit is that he is writing to a church that was filled with conflict and controversy. "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other" (Galatians 5:26). The painful point is that the Galatian church (and churches everywhere for that matter) was supposed to be filled with Christians for whom loving should be natural, but instead was often a community of conflict.

We are faced with the undeniable fact that bearing the fruit of love is not natural or easy. According to Paul's instructions to the Galatian church, if we are not careful, instead of bearing the Fruit of the Spirit, we can unleash the acts of the sinful nature: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, and orgies. Interestingly, the first act in Paul's list of the sinful nature is the counterfeit of love, sexual immorality (Galatians 5:19-21).

Planting Love

How do we move from unleashing the unsavory acts of the sinful nature to bearing the Fruit of the Spirit and specifically the fruit of love? To keep with Paul's image of fruit bearing, perhaps we should think in terms of gardening: soil, seed, water, weeding, tilling, and pruning. We need good soil and good seed to begin with—in Scriptural terms that would be converted hearts (good soil) receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ (good seed).

Cultivating Love

We need to water the seeds in the ground, pull the weeds, turn the soil, and clip here and there appropriately. In short, we bear fruit if we cultivate our hearts. Left to grow without cultivation our hearts can become hard and weeds can choke them.

Cultivating the fruit of love requires thoughtful and informed reflection on the Scriptures. When we turn to the Scripture, we find that love is an instinctively satisfying theme throughout the Bible. When Moses prepares Israel for his departure, he wants them to know that the God they serve is a God of love. "Because he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength..." (Deuteronomy 4:37). Toward the end of the New Testament letters, as the apostle John is preparing to pass on the legacy of the gospel to generations of Christians to follow, he writes most specifically: "God is love" (1 John 4:16).

As we study Scripture we see multiple dimensions of love are addressed in God's word as well. The Old Testament uses two primary words for love, *ahed* and *hesed*. *Ahed* is the kind of love between a parent and a child, a slave and a master, or affection between friends. It can even be

I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

Jeremiah 31:3

used for good food. And, it is used for God's love for us as Jeremiah writes that God has loved, *ahed*, us with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3). The other word for love, *hesed*, gets translated a variety of ways, most frequently as kindness, loving-kindness or unfailing love. What doesn't quite get through in those translations is that this kind of love is a committed love. It's that kind of love that doesn't vary, break, or cease—but is an unbreakable bond. This word is used primarily for the love of God. Hosea, the prophet of God's love, wrote, "I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them" (Hosea 11:4).

The Greeks, being the thinkers that they were, had four words for love which came over into English as affection, friendship, *eros* and charity. Neither affection nor *eros* are found in the New Testament. Affection is the kind of love you feel for familiar people and things; and *eros* is what we refer to as falling in love. Friendship is what two people who are engaged in common tasks and common interests share. In the New Testament, friendship shows up as *philadelphia*—brotherly love. Charity is the old King James translation of the Greek word *agape* and it no longer captures the meaning of the word. *Agape* was rarely used in normal conversation in Greek culture. Since it was sort of an orphan word without clear content, it was adopted by the writers of the New Testament exclusively for the love of God. It accentuates that which is unique about the love of God—that God's love is self-initiating and self-generating. God loves not because we are lovely, inspiring or deserving, but because it is His nature to love. "...at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love (*agape*) for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8, parenthesis added).

Biting Into the Fruit of Love

Now having looked at the bigger picture, let's return to our passage. When Paul writes that a Fruit of the Spirit is love, he uses the word *agape*, which is God's love for us. And it is God's love for us, brought into our hearts by the Spirit, that can make a way for the Galatians and all Christians to escape the cycle of "biting and devouring each other" (Galatians 5:15).

First, we don't love others because they deserve it. Nor do we love others because they are treating us well. The love that comes from the Spirit is the love we express regardless of how we are being treated. Second, because this is God's love toward us which we share with each other, we can expect it to be the kind of love God reveals in the Old Testament. *Hesed*-love is the love which makes unbreakable commitments and which can be depended upon no matter what the circumstances. This means that as Christians we are bound together in a covenant love with God and with one another; we are in relationships for the long haul and we are not to be moving on when things get difficult.

Final Thought

Clearly such love is not natural—it is supernatural. Generally it is not our first response, but a second or third response. We won't get to this kind of love without some intentional effort. As we spend time in the Scriptures being continually exposed to the love of God, we are cultivating



But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Romans 5:8

our hearts to this kind of love from the Spirit. Therefore, as we cultivate a deeper love toward God, the Fruit of the Spirit—love—will blossom forth.

Spending Time With God

This 10 week study series, “The Fruit of the Spirit,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about this Fruit of the Spirit for which you are especially thankful to God. Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

Love is the foundational theme of Scripture. In your quiet times over the next three days, look up these passages and write down your observations and impressions.

Day 1

Exodus 34:6

Deuteronomy 7:9

Deuteronomy 7:12, 13



Psalm 33:5

Ephesians 5:1, 2

Day 2

Revelation 1:6

Psalm 145:8

Psalm 145:13

Discussion (Small Group Study)

1. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.

Zephaniah 3:17

John 3:16

2. The most extended discussion on God's *agape* love in the Scriptures is found in 1 Corinthians 13. Read through it now and then share your initial responses.

Day 3

John 13:33

Romans 8:35-39

3. What does the image of a clanging symbol or resounding gong say about these deeds not motivated by love?

Ephesians 2:4, 5



SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 2

Love | 1 Corinthians 13

4. Recall an experience of service towards others that you may have done (or experienced) that was not motivated by love. How might it have failed to achieve what you hoped?

5. Love is supremely important but notoriously hard to define. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Paul gives one of the most definitive descriptions of the attributes of love ever given in any literature of the world. How do you respond to his description?

6. According to Paul's description, love requires that we do certain things and that we refrain from doing others. What will you need to begin to do in new ways if you are to live by love?

7. What will you need to stop doing if you are to live by love?

8. It turns out that true love is everlasting (1 Corinthians 13: 8-9). How is this both a comfort and a challenge for believers?

9. Paul concludes his words on love by reflecting on spiritual maturity (1 Corinthians 13:10-12). How might his reflections be both a comfort and a challenge?

10. Spend a few minutes in prayer together asking that the Spirit would make the fruit of love a central motivation of your life.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

11. Jesus taught His disciples about love when He prepared to leave them on the night prior to the crucifixion. Read John 13:31-38 and record the insight you gain about love.



12. In John's first letter, love is an underlying theme. Read through 1 John 3 and write down the insights you gain into love.

15. Again, in light of the list, consider your conduct and attitudes in your family. Write down a few ways that you can improve. Pray that God would cause the fruit of love to be present.

13. Write out the ways that love acts in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Rate yourself with a plus or minus beside each in regard to those persons closest to you. Keep the list where you can see it. Pray that God will grow the fruit of love in your life for each person on the list.

14. In light of the list, consider your conduct and attitudes in your church. Write down a few ways that you can improve. Pray that God would cause the fruit of love to be present.

Scripture for Meditation

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.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7



But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Galatians 5:22

Introduction

At a gathering of university presidents, a reporter asked these leading educators to characterize the state of today's college students. There was a silence in the room and then one of them said, "emptiness". In a student world awash with cars, computers, and iPods, and at time of life that is filled with classes, social and extra curricula activities, this is a sobering statement. Perhaps there was never a more eloquent testimony to Jesus' statement that a person's life does not consist in the abundance of things (Luke 12:15).

The opposite of emptiness, that seems to be a culture wide affliction, is a rich overflowing inner abundance that produces the Fruit of the Spirit. The Christian life is to be characterized by an inner vitality, a fullness that overflows. As we saw last week, according to Paul, the first quality of this fruit is love, a self giving engagement with others that is inspired and empowered by the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). After tasting the fruit of love, according to Paul, the next flavor one should notice is joy.

Joy in the Bible

Every human being is hungry for joy and a sense of joy pervades the Bible. Looking in a concordance one finds a number of references to words for positive emotions like "merry", "delight" and "glad". However, joy and related words such as rejoicing appear hundreds of times.

Joy is commonly a group expression often associated with dancing. God's praise is shouted and sung even in public worship (Ezra 3:10-11) and uses musical instruments, clapping, leaping, and foot-stamping. A number of years ago, the play and movie *Fiddler on the Roof* captured this communal joy in the story of the small Jewish shtetl (town) of Anatevka in Tsarist Russia in 1905. Even though Tevye the milkman and his village experienced persecution from the Russian pogroms, they found joy in dark times as they gathered to sing and dance. With the entire community gathered in a torch lighted barn, men with long beards dressed in long black coats danced together with high kicks, low squats, rhythmic claps and shouts of joy. All who watched were pulled into the celebration. When the dance was over everyone in the theater wanted to stand and shout hooray!

In Israel there were three yearly public festivals of joy, when whole families made pilgrimages to Jerusalem to celebrate their faith:

- Passover, with its days of unleavened bread (Leviticus 23:4-8).
- Firstfruits, also called the Feast of Weeks and Pentecost (Leviticus 23:9-21).
- Tabernacles, also called Booths or the Feast of Ingathering (Leviticus 23:33-36).

The source of joy for Old Testament believers was God who shared His grace and goodness in rich and diverse ways. Joy is found in God's creation as morning is greeted with joy (Psalms 30:5) for which the watchman has waited eagerly (Psalms 130:6). The Law was also a source of joy as the psalmist writes that "the precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart" (Psalms 19:8a). Most of all joy was experienced in the celebration of God's saving acts when He delivered

You have made known
to me the path of life;
You will fill me with joy
in Your presence, with
eternal pleasures at Your
right hand.

Psalm 16:11

His people from slavery and oppression (Psalms 105:42-45).

Joy is an even more prevailing theme in the New Testament. Jesus sets the standard as He expects that His disciples will be full of joy in obeying His commands and loving one another (John 15:11). And Jesus expects that this joy He brings will even be present in the dark times of persecution (Matthew 5:11,12). Peter, having learned from his Lord writes of a believer's joy despite suffering: "In this [salvation] 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 your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:6-9).

Passionate Joy

The saving work of God in Christ is expected to generate joy, whatever our circumstances. This joy is not merely a grit your teeth thing, but an overflowing of the heart. The Oxford American Dictionary defines joy: "vivid emotions of pleasure; extreme gladness." In the Oxford American Thesaurus words associated with joy include: delight, pleasure, gladness, enjoyment, gratification, happiness, rapture, glee, bliss, ecstasy, elation, exultation, jubilation, and euphoria. The contrast of joy is joyless; meaning gloomy, dreary, drab, dismal, bleak, depressing, cheerless, grim, desolate, and comfortless.

Jonathan Edwards writes of the effusive passionate nature of joy in his book *Religious Affections*. "The religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above a state of indifference. God in His word, greatly insists upon it, that we be in good earnest, 'fervent in spirit' and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion" (J.E. p. 27). Certainly we are to be serious about our faith, but we are missing something if that seriousness comes across as a joyless, effort filled drudge.

Catching Fire

If we are honest, few of us experience this type of joy as a way of life. What may be missing? Like the Old Testament, joy in the New Testament is most often linked with God's work in fellow believers that we love and serve. Paul writes to fellow believers in Corinth that his motivation for ministry is that they together may share joy (2 Corinthians 1:24). Likewise he writes to the church in Philippi that he is eager to see them so that together they may share in the joy in the faith (Philippians 1:25).

There are three Greek words for joy used in the New Testament and two of the three pick up on shared and public celebration:

- *Agalliao* is a loud, public expression of joy in worship.
- *Euphraino* emphasizes a community joy, religious festival or neighborly banquet. It does not describe the feelings of the individual as much as the atmosphere of shared enjoyment.



I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

3 John 1:4

There is something contagious about joy. We may come to the sanctuary from a hard week and are feeling anything but joy. However, like logs placed on a burning fire, when we gather together with others who are singing and celebrating God's goodness and grace, our dry and sluggish hearts can catch the fire of joy. The music lifts us and our toes begin to tap.

Of course there are worship services in which joy is not contagious. People sing and go through the motions of worship but it's sleepy at best. Churches like the Galatian church, filled with doctrinal and personal conflicts, will find ways to quench the joy that is the gift of God's Spirit. In such circumstances, those observing us might wonder whether we too had that inner emptiness which characterizes many of today's college students. However, if the Spirit of God dwells in us, then the joy is there, it just has to be uncovered and allowed to bubble up and out. Whether you find your heart ignited on Sunday or you find yourself going through the motions, a look at the teaching of the Scriptures on joy can only add fuel to the fire.

Spending Time With God

This 10 week study series, "The Fruit of the Spirit," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about this Fruit of the Spirit for which you are especially thankful to God.

Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. Reflect on your current state of joy by rating yourself on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high).

3. The book of Psalms records a rainbow of human emotions from despair to delight and everything in between. Read the following selections and write down insights you gain about joy.

Psalm 95:1-7

Psalm 96:9-13

Psalm 98:4-9

Psalm 19:8-14

4. Joy is contagious. Spend time quietly reflecting on the passages from these Psalms. Write a brief prayer asking God to unleash His joy in your heart.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.

6. Joy is one the central themes of Paul's letter to the church at Philippi. He prays for them with joy (Philippians 1:4), lives and ministers for their joy (Philippians 1:25), for joy seeks their spiritual maturity (Philippians 2:2), and describes them as "my joy" (Philippians 4:1). How would you feel if you were part of the church that received this letter?

7. The church at Philippi was under pressure from external opponents (Philippians 1:28) and inner conflicts (Philippians 4:2). How would Paul's references to joy be helpful for dealing with their challenges?



8. How has the Church (not a building, but God's gathered people) been a source of joy for you?

9. What can you learn from Paul about relating to fellow believers?

10. Salvation in Christ does not mean a trouble free life. Peter writes to Christian churches scattered throughout northeastern Roman Empire (1 Peter 1:1), who are experiencing grief because their faith is being tested (1 Peter 1:6). In what ways have you been disappointed with God?

11. Although they are under stress, Peter observes that they are filled with an "inexpressible and glorious joy" (1 Peter 1:8). According to Peter, what are the sources of this joy (1 Peter 1: 3-9)?

12. How are their struggles actually beneficial (1 Peter 1:7)?

13. In the Greek, both the rejoicing (1 Peter 1:6) and joy (1 Peter 1:8) are forms of the Greek word for public celebrations *agalliao*. How can the sharing of our struggles be means of shared joy?

14. How can worship services and small group meetings be a means of sharing struggles and joy?

15. How might the fruit of joy (Galatians 5:22) have been helpful to the conflicted church at Galatia? Based on your study and discussion, what would you say to help them get past their problems?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

16. How was joy essential to Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-4)?



17. How is anticipation an important dynamic in the joy in the Christian life?

21. Despite the emptiness that many feel in the midst of modern life, there is a fullness which we can all experience family, sunrises and sunsets, sports, achievements, good food with good friends all are sources of joy in the world. Make a list of your favorite sources of joy and write a prayer thanking God for the joy of creation and salvation.

18. What can we learn about joy from Jesus' parables of the kingdom?

Matthew 13:18-23

Matthew 13:44-46

19. According to Jesus, how is joy a sign of spiritual life?

20. There is a much in the world that can bring joy. When do these other sources of joy become a problem for our experience of the kingdom of God?

Scripture for Meditation

As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

Isaiah 62:5



But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Galatians 5:22

Introduction

The Spirit enriches God's people with love, joy, and peace. Certainly the Galatian church needed peace as they were a community in which there were pervasive competition and conflict. So too this world of ours, in the 21st century, needs peace—from the highest levels of government to the inner depths of human hearts.

The Serenity Prayer, written by American theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr and used extensively by Alcoholics Anonymous and many others, is a prayer for peace.

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

The Serenity Prayer is an essential tool used in recovery programs for coping with the chaos of a life out of control and addicted to food, alcohol, drugs, sex, work, etc. The person who prays this prayer confesses the need for help from a higher power because it has become clear that they can't run their own lives. Considering the state of the world today, this prayer would be appropriate for political leaders of all nations who face a bewilderingly complex world that is clearly out of their control.

The Peace of Creation

Of course, as Christians we believe that people need to pray, not just to a generic higher power, but to the highest power Who is a Person—the God of the Bible, the Creator of the world. He is the true Lord of Peace. The opening scene in Scripture describes the world moving from chaos (Genesis 1:1-2) to peace as God orders it, separating light from dark, land from sky, and water from land on the first three days. Once the sorting is done, He fills it all with life on days four through six. Day seven is the Sabbath, a rest in which there can be a celebration of peace. When the world has been harmonized together by its creator, God then steps back to enjoy it and sees that it is very good (Genesis 1:31). The peace of day seven is not a dead stillness, but a symphony of all the various elements of creation working together under the hand of its Creator (Genesis 2:2). Although a hundred fold less, this is the peace we taste on a spring day when the sun is shining, a gentle breeze is moving and there are buds on the trees.

Humanity, made in the image of God, gets to share in the harmonious ordering of creation as Adam names the creatures (Genesis 2:20). The Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, captures the rich, living diversity of the creation account that expresses itself in the joyous celebration of Adam with the consummation of Eve (Genesis 2:23, 25). *Shalom* means soundness, completeness, security, welfare, prosperity and peace. Likewise the Greek word for peace conveys similar ideas—harmony, concord, security, safety, and assurance.

The quiet afternoon divine/human walks in God's garden, the ultimate picture of peace (Genesis 3:8-9), are disrupted by sin. The symphony of creation becomes a cacophony of fear as humanity now hides from its Creator in the bushes (Genesis 3:10). Step by step the invading chaos

...and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.

Colossians 1:20

spreads as the man blames the woman (Genesis 3:12) and the woman blames the serpent (Genesis 3:13). There is no more harmony, and the original peace of God in creation is gone. Death is the natural result of chaos and bears its ugly fruit as Cain, the first born of human parents, kills his brother. In its declaration of independence from its creator, the human race discovers that peace on earth is gone.

The Peace of Salvation

The restoration of peace in creation is what the biblical concept of salvation is all about. We sometimes get the idea that salvation is a transaction just between me and God in which my soul is saved and I am welcomed into heaven. Likewise, peace is often thought of as a personal experience in my heart. However, the expectation of the prophets in the Old Testament was that into this chaotic creation there would come a new time of shalom/peace in which all of creation would be in a peaceful harmony, even “the wolf and the lamb will feed together...” (Isaiah 65:25). Best of all, rather than obscure and distant, God will be readily accessible as God promises, “Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear” (Isaiah 65:24).

The prophets longed for this peace that is to be brought by the Messiah, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). It is not surprising then that at the good news of Jesus’ birth, Zechariah celebrates that God is sending light that will guide His people “into the path of peace” (Luke 1:79) and the angel chorus would proclaim “...on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14). Nor should it surprise us that what Jesus promises to His disciples is peace (John 14:27), or that the message of salvation which the disciples proclaim is “the good news of peace through Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:36). Furthermore, the church of Jesus Christ is called to be a community in which conflicted races and cultures find peace (Ephesians 2:14-17) in anticipation of the time of the new heaven and earth (Revelation 21:1).

The Fight for Peace

How are we to walk in the peace of Jesus Christ? Here is the shocking paradox: until the final coming of peace in the new heaven and earth, it seems that Christians have to fight for their peace. Jesus brought us peace at the cost of His life. “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). The book of Revelation is a record of the cosmic battle in which Jesus is portrayed as a conquering general on a white horse (Revelation 19:11-21), defeating the powers which cause chaos so God’s peace can completely be restored to His creation.

Our task as Christians is to join Jesus Christ in this fight for peace. Jonathan Edwards wrote, “The strength of a good soldier of Jesus Christ appears in nothing more than in steadfastly maintaining the holy calm, meekness, sweetness, and benevolence of mind amidst all the storms, injuries, strange behavior, and surprising acts and events of this evil and unreasonable world” (*Religious Affection*, p. 278). Just as every garden has to be weeded, infections, bacteria, and viruses need to be resisted, bullies must be confronted, and combatting terrorists requires vigilance, so too, there is a battle as we seek to live in the peace which we have in Jesus Christ our Lord.



The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.

Romans 8:6

Surrender to Peace

While there is much that assaults us, the true battle is surrendering to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We are in bondage to chaos, and our lives become unmanageable because we seek to rule in the place of God. Creation became de-centered, de-stabilized and conflicted when our first parents sought to occupy that place which belongs only to the Creator. We humans don't give up this self-sovereignty easily. It is a fight to lay down our personal sense of independence and surrender to God. When we surrender the battle is won, harmony is restored, and the Spirit begins to bear the fruit of peace for all to enjoy.

Spending Time With God

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SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 4

Peace | Philippians 2:1-11, 4:2-9

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down insights about this Fruit of the Spirit for which you are especially thankful to God. Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. Anxiety can be contagious. You can feel it spread in times of national crisis or in the midst of difficulties at church, at work, or in the home. Write down the sources of anxiety in your own life.

3. Write down national or international events/issues that bring you a sense of anxiety.

4. Take your list of anxieties and then surrender them to the Lord. Some people like to picture or imagine laying their lists at the foot of the cross of before God's throne. After you have surrendered your concerns to Him spend a few minutes resting in His presence and then write down how this exercise affected you.

5. What encouragement and comfort do you find in the following scriptures?

Psalm 29:11

Psalm 4:8

Psalm 119:165

6. God's desire is for each Christian and each Christian congregation to be a place of peace. Inspired by the preceding Scriptures, write a brief prayer asking for God's peace for yourself, your family, and your church.



SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 4

Peace | Philippians 2:1-11, 4:2-9

Discussion (Small Group Study)

7. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.

8. Like the Galatian church, the Philippian church was struggling with personal conflicts and competition. In fact, Paul names two members of the conflicted parties and makes a personal appeal to Euodia and Syntyche to agree with each other (Philippians 4:2). What spiritual qualities does Paul appeal to in order to encourage peace in the church (Philippians 2:1-4)?

9. Peace between people requires a shared unity. What do you think it means to be one in spirit and of one mind (Philippians 2:2)?

10. From your own experience, how would you characterize the difference between entering a meeting in which there was sense of unity or where people were divided?

11. Jesus is Paul's model for humility and surrender that is the source of peace within the Christian community (Philippians 2:5-11). What can we learn from Jesus that will free us to live in peace?

12. How is the model of Jesus just the opposite of Adam and Eve?

13. We don't know what the problem between Euodia and Syntyche was, but Paul had reasons to be concerned. How can personal differences affect an entire community?

14. Paul makes an appeal to a peacemaker, an un-named "loyal yokefellow" (Philippians 3:2). Who have you known as peacemakers and what was it about them that encouraged peace?



SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 4

Peace | Philippians 2:1-11, 4:2-9

15. Friends, prayer, good thoughts, and the presence of God are all helpful in the practice of peace (Philippians 4:3,6,9). Which of these do you turn to most frequently in times of anxiety and turmoil?

19. Isaiah writes that it is in “repentance and rest” that God’s people would be saved (Isaiah 30:15). How might returning and rest be partners in allowing us to experience God’s peace?

16. How would you rate your own ability to encourage peace among your family and friends?

20. Paul writes of the “peace of God which, passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7 RSV). Describe a time when you experienced such a peace. What happened?

17. How would you like to grow spiritually so that you live in peace and bring a sense of peace to others?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

18. What has God done to bring peace back into His world (Romans 5:1-11)?

Scripture for Meditation

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:3



But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Galatians 5:22

Introduction

Imagine children playing a game of computer monopoly. For awhile there is fun and laughter, but then, things get tense as the youngest one begins to lose. In frustration, he starts to misbehave and a shouting match begins. The tension in the room grows as the older ones are not going to put up with such misbehavior. Suddenly, the game comes to an abrupt halt as the youngest boy stomps out and runs upstairs to his room. The two older boys walk away, exasperated. With a little more patience, the game could have gone on but children aren't known for their patience.

Considering the behavior of those children, one is reminded of the old proverb, patience is a virtue. As we think about growing together in the Church of Jesus Christ, we can be thankful that not only is patience a virtue, but more importantly, it is one of the manifestations of the Fruit of the Spirit. If we are going to enjoy the riches of our life together that God intends, then we are going to need lots of patience with each other.

There are two Greek words primarily used for patience in the New Testament. Understanding both and the difference between the words are important. Without this background we won't understand what Paul has in mind for life together in the church of Jesus Christ nor will we be able to cultivate the character necessary to cope with the overwhelming pressures of this busy world.

The Patience of Job

One Greek word for *patience* means "to endure, to keep going under difficult circumstances, in short, to wait for promised deliverance." Job demonstrated this type of patience as he experienced his tragedies. Christians are to demonstrate this kind of patience in the challenges of life as we wait for the fulfillment of God's promises and the completion of our salvation. The writer of Hebrews encourages us to "run with perseverance (patience) the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1).

A number of years ago Eugene Peterson published a book entitled *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. This title captures the essence of this type of patience. When we wonder if we can keep going another day and we do it anyway out of a sense of faithful obedience to God, we are demonstrating such patience.

Often developed under great trials and tribulations, the patience of Job is a key ingredient in the make up of Christian character. It shows up under pressure (Romans 5:3) and results in receiving the promises of the Christian life (Hebrews 10:36). We see this when Jesus commends the church at Philadelphia for showing patient obedience under trials and promises to bless them as a result (Revelation 3:10).

The Patience of Love

The other Greek word for *patience* means "to be restrained and gracious in our relationships." This is the word for patience which Paul uses in Galatians 5:22. It is the opposite of being "short-tempered." In the Greek it is a compound of two words: one word meaning to hold at

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 4:32

a distance, the other meaning anger or strong emotions. Putting the two words together, this word means *restrained anger*. In its most basic form, this kind of patience means that we held ourselves back when we would rather let somebody know what we really think of them.

When Israel leaves Egypt and begins its journey through the desert, they are impatient with God, doubting that He will continue to protect them while providing for their needs (Exodus 16:3). When Moses takes too long up on the mountain, they create their own god (Exodus 32:4). In contrast to Israel's impatience, God demonstrates patience, restraining Himself from exercising the anger that would wipe them out. You can see why, in the King James Version of the Bible this word for patience was often translated as long-suffering.

While the root word means the restraint of anger, in Scripture the word takes on greater depth than mere restraint. At the heart of God's restraint is a gracious love, not raw self-control. The Scriptural development of this kind of patience is expressed by the Apostle Paul when he writes, "love is patient" (1 Corinthians 13:4) as the first in his famous list of the attributes of love. In the Old Testament where God is often thought by some to be full of anger, a deeper reading shows God to be "...the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness..." (Exodus 34:6).

The gracious, loving restraint of God's patience is most clearly taught by Jesus in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:21-35). A servant, owing well over the equivalent of several million dollars, asks for patience so that he can repay a sum which was, of course, completely unpayable for a servant. Since the servant was responsible for squandering the master's resources, he was liable, and prison was the expected consequence. Not only did the master demonstrate patience, refraining from executing judgment, he forgave the entire debt. Here again, we see that patience is not merely a holding back of anger, but of expressing grace.

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus also portrays the positive side of this patience as the father waits with eager expectation for his son to return and then warmly receives him. In contrast, the older brother has no patience for his younger brother and is angry that he is graciously and warmly welcomed home.

Living Patiently

In the nexus of relationships that make up a family, church, or any community, the patience that is the Fruit of the Spirit is the kind we need to counter our tendencies to hurt, offend, and generally get on each others nerves. Parents demonstrate this kind of patience with children when counting to ten before speaking. Usually in most of our relationships, we don't merely count to ten, we count in terms of months and years. This kind of patience was occasionally translated as steadfast. Instead of leaving when provoked, we stand firm. Friends demonstrate this kind of patience when commitments are broken. When there are deep disappointments that might lead us to walk away but instead we keep at it, this is the patience that is the Fruit of the Spirit.

Without patience homes and churches are not safe places. When parents can fly into a rage at any moment for the slightest reason, home (and life) is experienced as dangerous. Those growing up in volatile impatient homes often struggle with emotional scars that continue long



Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Romans 12:12

after they have moved away. Likewise, those growing up in cold homes full of suppressed anger also experience emotional scars. In a church where there is little patience, members will feel a need to create a façade. More likely than not, there will be a legalism in which people judge each other for their failures.

In contrast with either volatile or repressed anger, Biblical patience is continued caring in the face of difficulties and disappointments. In such an environment, people can make mistakes, admit them, and be assured that there will be lots of second chances. Instead of fear, there is confidence. Instead of judgment, there will be grace.

Patience as the Fruit of the Spirit doesn't stand alone; it is part of the rich complexities of life together. Each biblical virtue is connected to the others. For instance, patience as restraint is complimented by patience as endurance as we not only check our initial responses to attack someone who has disappointed us, but we will keep on doing this over an extended period of time.

Both kinds of patience, however, are not sufficient by themselves. They are enriched by other flavors of the Fruit of the Spirit such as peace, joy, and love. Paul encourages the church at Colossae to live in a way that incorporates patience with all of the fruit. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in a perfect unity" (Colossians 3:12-14).

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SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 5

Patience | Galatians 5:16-26

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down insights about this Fruit of the Spirit for which you are especially thankful to God. Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. Although the kind of patience listed in the Fruit of the Spirit is that of *restraint*, it is important to understand patience as *endurance* as well. Read Psalm 40:1-5. David waited patiently for the Lord's help. What is the difference between waiting patiently and waiting impatiently?

3. Why is waiting patiently for the Lord often difficult?

4. David was in a slimy pit and a muddy mire—what “slimy pits” have caused you to cry out to the Lord?

5. Patiently waiting requires trust (Psalm 40:3-4). What does it mean to put your trust in the Lord?

6. In Psalm 40:3 David celebrates God's deliverance with a new song. You may not be a poet or song writer, but you can still worship the Lord with your own new song. Take time now or later to write out a few lines of praise to God.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

7. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.

8. Read Matthew 18:15-20. When a Christian sins against us, Jesus tells us to “go and show him his fault” (Matthew 18: 15). When someone offends you, how do you tend to respond?



SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 5

Patience | Galatians 5:16-26

9. Why not just avoid the person who offended us?

13. How does the parable of the king and his servant illustrate God's patience toward us (Matthew 18:23-27)?

10. Why do we sometimes want to avoid the process of confrontation and reconciliation?

14. What is the relationship between patience and forgiveness?

11. Read Matthew 18:21-35. What is the connection between Jesus' teaching on reconciliation and Peter's question about the frequency of forgiveness (Matthew 18:21)?

15. God is the Master who has forgiven our massive debt of sin. How does God's patience affect you?

12. What is the difference between forgiving seven times and forgiving seventy-seven times (Matthew 18:22)?

16. Think of someone who has offended you or sinned against you. How can you exercise patience toward them?



Digging Deeper (Further Study)

17. Read the following five proverbs and write out what they have to say about patience.

Proverbs 14:29

Proverbs 15:18

Proverbs 16:32

Proverbs 19:11

Proverbs 25:15

18. How would you summarize the qualities of a patient person?

19. What contrasts are drawn between a patient and impatient person?

20. How does patience/impatience affect our relationships with others?

21. How have you seen patience/impatience affect relationships in your life?

22. How could patience be a great asset in your workplace, classroom, home?

23. What changes do you need to make in the way you act and think in order to become more patient?

Scripture for Meditation

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.

James 5:7



But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Galatians 5:22

Introduction

In her book, *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott records her conversion experience. God's grace brought her from a life of aimlessness and addiction to a life of faith. One of the keys to her conversion was the way that God reached out to her through the kindness of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. She describes the church as outwardly uninviting. It "looked homely and impoverished, a ramshackle building with a cross on top, sitting on a small parcel of land with a few skinny trees. "Actually it didn't look much better inside. It had "terrible linoleum that was brown and over-shined, and plastic stained-glass windows."

At first, she couldn't bring herself to even enter. She just stood at the back door listening to the choir comprised of five black women and one "Amish-looking" white man. For many Sundays, she would leave before the sermon. But then God called her and she became a regular—even eagerly staying through the sermon all the way to the benediction. Then, there came the time when she needed to give up her chemical dependencies. Not really excited about this she writes, "I was not sure that I could or even wanted to go one day without drinking or pills or cocaine. But it turned out that I could and a whole lot of people were going to help me, with their kind eyes and hot cups of coffee." We can learn a lot from her encounter with God's kindness through His people.

A Call to Kindness

So far in our explorations of the Fruit of the Spirit, we have considered love, joy, peace, and patience. Kindness is next in Paul's list of spiritual nutrients. The Greek philosopher, Philo wrote: "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." Henry James, the famous author of the late 19th century wrote, "Three things in human life are important. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. The third is to be kind."

The good news is, God is kind and by the grace of His Spirit we get to share the kindness of God. In the Old Testament, God led his people "with cords of human kindness" (Hosea 11:4). He most clearly shows His kindness in the New Testament by extending it through His Son, when we were dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:5). Likewise God wants us to be kind to each other. "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience" (Colossians 3:12).

The dictionary defines *kindness* as "the quality of being warm-hearted and considerate, humane and sympathetic." Kindness can be expressed in encouragement, care, patience, and help. The church at Galatia, conflicted as it was, would have little energy for being kind; they were too busy fighting with each other. But a church in step with the Spirit will be comprised of people with warm hearts who can be kind to one another and to the needy people, like Anne Lamott.

The story of David and Mephibosheth is a touching story of the kindness that God wants from his people (2 Samuel 9:1-11). After David has emerged as the victorious new king of Israel from his 10 year long conflict with Saul, he does something unheard of in battles for royal power. He asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake" (2 Samuel 9:1)? Showing kindness was unheard of in David's situation. It is customary to

And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.

2 Timothy 2:24

wipe out the entire family of the preceding ruler. Otherwise, family members, even distant ones, can come back in later years to incite an insurrection in an attempt to reclaim the throne.

David is told of Mephibosheth—a crippled son of Jonathan. So he invites Mephibosheth to the palace and says, "Don't be afraid... for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table" (2 Samuel 9:7).

The Benefits of Kindness

David's kindness was dangerous, but it was worth the risk. For one thing, Mephibosheth's lot in life is dramatically improved. Instead of death or life as a fugitive, he is honored and provided for. David, too, benefits by this act of kindness as it shaped the character of his reign and encouraged national unity. By showing kindness to Mephibosheth, David sets a gracious tone that encouraged loyalty and respect rather than resentment and rebellion among the uneasy alliance of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The famous novel, play, and movie, *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo is about the contagious dynamic of kindness. *Les Misérables* is set in Paris in the tumultuous revolutionary period of the 19th century. The protagonist, Jean Valjean, is sentenced to prison for 19 years for stealing a loaf of bread. After his release, Valjean robs the Bishop Myriel of the household silver. Valjean is caught in short order. Instead of having the police return Valjean to prison, the priest not only gives Valjean the household silver but the golden candlesticks as well. This act of kindness forever affects Valjean. Eventually he becomes a successful businessman, benefactor, and mayor. The rest of his life are expressions of kindness to the prostitute, Fantine; to the prostitute's daughter, Cosette; to Cosette's suitor, Marius, who is wounded during a revolutionary fight; and to Javier, the police inspector who haunted Valjean throughout most of his life.

The novel, *Great Expectations*, by Charles Dickens, also demonstrates the consequences of kindness. A young boy, Pip, helps out an escaping convict, Magwitch. In later years, for this act of kindness, the convict finds a way to become Pip's benefactor, providing the financial resources that allow Pip to live as a gentleman which was no small gift in Victorian England. In contrast to Pip is the young girl, Estella, raised by the angry Mrs. Havershaw, who was jilted at the altar and thereafter lived a life of frozen bitterness. There was no kindness in the house of Mrs. Havershaw and consequently no warmth in the heart of Estella. Through the relationship of Pip and Estella, Dickens chronicles the rippling consequences of both kindness and bitterness as we see how meanness steals joy and withers the spirit, while kindness generates grace and peace.

Moving from 19th century stories of kindness, the movie, *Pay it Forward*, is a 21st century Hollywood production that traces the consequences of kindness. Trevor McKinney is a young boy living in Las Vegas slums with an alcoholic mother and an abusive father. Trevor is inspired by his teacher to counter the consequences of pain perpetuated by paying back those who hurt you. Instead of perpetuating pain, Trevor begins a movement of spreading care by initiating acts of kindness to three people that one might not even know. Eventually Trevor's campaign brings the benefits of kindness to his teacher, his mother, and countless others.

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

1 Peter 3:8

Constant Acts of Kindness

A number of years ago, one presidential candidate called for a national campaign for “random acts of kindness.” Such a campaign is in harmony with the Spirit of the God for His people, but it doesn’t quite go far enough. God wants to us make kindness a way of life, not merely a campaign.

Kindness can be expressed in many ways. Visiting the sick is a time honored way that members of churches show kindness. So is praying for those in need. However, being kind need not be limited to a campaign or to being spiritual. Looking for a plug for a laptop computer in a local bookstore, a man found that the only table with a plug was already in use. However the computer user near the plug was running his computer on batteries and he immediately volunteered to move to a different table—that’s an act of kindness. One person living in Chicago found a \$20.00 bill as he was getting into his car. As he came to his first toll booth, he used the money to pay for the tolls for cars that followed—that’s and act of kindness too. A store clerk in downtown Cincinnati puts money in parking meters for all the cars parked in front of her store before the time runs out. Driving down the street on a hot day, a man saw children sitting behind a table selling popsicles. He stopped his car and not only bought one for himself but gave the children a handful of dollars and told them to take a popsicle to all of their friends on the street. Once we begin to look, the opportunities for kindness are endless.

God’s Kind People

Paul’s vision of the Church as a community of spiritual life, bearing the Fruit of the Spirit, surely found expression at St. Andrew’s for Anne Lamott. This is the way of the Spirit in the Church throughout the ages. He transforms our hearts so that we become people whose kind eyes express kind hearts extending a helping hand in time of need.

Spending Time With God

This 10 week study series, “The Fruit of the Spirit,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about the Fruit of Kindness for which you are especially thankful to God. Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

Proverbs 28:8

3. How does God instruct us to be a model of kindness (Luke 6:35)?

2. What do you learn about kindness from the following Proverbs?

Proverbs 11:17

4. How have you experienced God's kindness?

Proverbs 12:25

Proverbs 14:21

5. How can you express God's kindness to those around you?

Proverbs 23:7



Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.

7. The Book of 2 Samuel contains a touching story of kindness in the friendship between David and Jonathan, Mephibosheth's father. Can you name anyone in your life with whom you have had a similar relationship?

8. After reading 2 Samuel, why do you think David spared Mephibosheth's life?

9. How did this impact Mephibosheth's life?

10. How are the acts of kindness shown by David to be an example for us in our Christian walk? (Matthew 19:30; Luke 6:27-35)?

11. How is this story a portrayal of Christ's love for us? Can you draw some parallels? (Romans 5:8)



12. Mephibosheth probably felt that God had deserted him and that he would surely die. Have there been times in your life when you felt deserted by God, but later discovered that God had been kind to you? Briefly describe that experience.

15. What other stories from Scripture can you recount that demonstrate acts of kindness? Which one is your favorite?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

13. What role does kindness have in Christian leadership (2 Timothy 2:24)?

14. What role does kindness have in the Christian home (Titus 2:3-5)?

Scripture for Meditation

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 4:31-32



But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Galatians 5:22

Introduction

Life in the Christian community is enriched when the Spirit of Jesus Christ is allowed to bear the Fruit of Goodness among us. The words translated *good* in the Old Testament are forms of the word *tob*. This simple word means “good” in the broadest possible sense. It includes the beautiful, the attractive, the useful, the profitable, the desirable and the morally right. The New Testament occurrences of “good” in the English versions are translations of two Greek words, *agathos* and *kalos*. *Agathos* views the good as useful or profitable and that which is morally good. *Kalos* tends to bring out the aesthetic aspect of good, that which is not only beneficial but also beautiful. The heart of goodness in the Scriptures is perhaps most clearly seen when contrasted with evil. Evil is the warping of the divine pattern, the twisting of things so that they are not the way God intends the world to be. In contrast, whatever is good is free from flaw, in full balance, and in harmony with God and the way God intends the world to be.

The Problem of Goodness

Lack of goodness is the plague of the human race and the cause of a great deal of pain. How different the world would be if goodness characterized all of our actions and all of our relationships! How different the morning news would be if goodness was the motivation of every human heart! Crime would vanish, wars would cease and peace would be the norm. Not only would there be less pain, there would be less suspicion and fear as well. Trust would be the way of life for all of us.

The issue of goodness is central to human existence. One of the most pressing questions in the world for both philosophers and the rest of us is, “Why does anything bad happen at all?” When we think about this problem, there are two issues: first is that of the goodness of God, and the second is the goodness of humanity.

The Goodness of God

The first sin, which led to the fall of humanity, revolved around the question of the goodness of God. Satan assaulted the good character of God, implying that God was withholding the fruit of Tree of Good and Evil from Adam and Eve, because He was depriving them of something good. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5).

Satan has away of getting right to the heart of things. He attacks the character of God and all of creation by this accusation. If God is not good, then the world is a dangerous place in which there is no reason to hope that things will get any better. If God is not good, then He is worse than the devil—for God would have no qualms about inflicting and enjoying our pain in an infinite variety of ways with His infinite power. If God is not good, then what reason is there for any of us to be good?

The emphatic witness of the Scriptures is that God is good. In an intimate touching conversation between Moses and God (Exodus 33:12-23), Moses asks to see God’s glory—that is, His radiant unveiled presence. God answers by saying “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you,

Give thanks to the Lord,
for He is good; His love
endures forever.

Psalm 118:1

and I will proclaim my name, in your presence” (Exodus 33:19). In other words the Lord God is saying that His very essence, His total character is good.

God is good and the entire world reflects His goodness, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). The Psalms celebrate the goodness of God, “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever” (Psalm 118:1). All the goodness of the world is connected directly to God, “I said to the LORD, You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing” (Psalm 16:2). In fact, Jesus teaches that God alone is good, “‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good except God alone’” (Luke 18:19).

Mixed Motives

God is good. However, there are serious questions about us. Though we were created good in God’s image, we turned away from Him. We became beings with our creator’s goodness now mixed in with selfish motives and impure hearts. This corrupted state of our being grieves God. “The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain” (Genesis 6:5-7). Jesus highlights this dark element of our nature when He says, “If you then, though you are evil...” (Luke 11:13). The Apostle Paul also affirms this dark side of our human nature when he writes that, “All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one” (Romans 3:12). This dismal appraisal of the human heart means that we are in for a battle; not only from those around us but from within ourselves as well. Paul writes about this inner battle in the book of Romans. “So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me” (Romans 7:21).

Good Behavior

The letters of the New Testament are filled with instructions to be good. James writes, “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins” (James 4:17). Paul, writing to Timothy, the young pastor of the church at Ephesus says, “Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share” (1 Timothy 6:18). Writing to the Christians who were experiencing persecution, Peter writes, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us” (1 Peter 2:12).

Furthermore, Jesus expects us to do good, and to be good, regardless of how we are treated (Luke 6:27, 33, 35). We are to keep on doing good, whether or not we see any immediate results. The apostle Paul writes, “Therefore let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart” (Galatians 6:9).

Our challenge is this: how can we be people who bear the Fruit of Goodness and how can our church become a community that is comprised of people who bear the Fruit of Goodness consistently? It is important to affirm that we can’t be good by following the rules. The Pharisees were famously scrupulous for keeping the law of God yet Jesus said, “...unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law you will certainly not enter the

For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men...

1 Peter 2:15

kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). In fact, rule keeping is often turned into ways of getting around being good as we see in court room dramas on television in which the fine points of the law are manipulated to excuse the guilty. Nor can we be good by determined choice. As we saw in our first look at the Fruit of the Spirit in the first lesson, willpower alone is insufficient to bring forth any Fruit of the Spirit.

The Fruit of Goodness

The solution to keep before us is that being good and doing good comes from the heart in which the Spirit of God dwells. We may have mixed motives, but it is God who dwells within us. The Apostle Paul encourages the Christians in the city of Philippi, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:6). As they face spiritual struggles they can be hopeful, because "...it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13). These Scriptures call us to see that as God works in us, among us, and through us that God's goodness bears fruit in our lives. The spiritual Fruit of Goodness especially invites/encourages the use of taste as a metaphor. We might say that a Christian who bears the Fruit of the Spirit tastes good just as a person who gives expression to the sinful nature tastes bad.

There is within everyone who has received Jesus Christ as Lord a desire for goodness that seeks to express itself. We need to let it out—to release it. Perhaps we have a desire to care for orphans, or to serve meals to the hungry, or to work as a volunteer in a hospital. Maybe we have a desire to be a volunteer in the church office, or to use handy-work skills to fix things for friends. There are hundreds of ways to do good things which benefit others and display the goodness of God in this mixed up world. When we release this desire for goodness inside, we are doing what we have been re-created in Christ to do "For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

Spending Time With God

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SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 7

Goodness | Ephesians 4:17-5:20

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about the Fruit of Goodness for which you are especially thankful to God.

Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. Look up the following verses and write down your reflections and insights on the goodness of God.

Psalm 118:1

Psalm 16:2

Luke 18:19

3. The Scriptures affirm that God is good and that He has made a good world (Genesis 1:9, 25, 31). How do you see the goodness of God in the world around you?

4. We are invited to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8). Write down several ways in which you find comfort and pleasure in trusting that God is good.

5. In a world full of pain, there may be times when we are tempted to cry out, “Why did this happen to me?” and to wonder if God is really good. In what ways have you struggled with the goodness of God?

DISCUSSION (SMALL GROUP STUDY)

6. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.



SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 7

Goodness | Ephesians 4:17-5:20

7. The Apostle Paul details the conduct expected of those in the Christian community. In effect he says, “Be good.” Let’s see if we can discern what he means. Read over Ephesians 4:17-5:20 and share your initial impressions.

8. What is the difference between those on the outside of faith in Christ and those who have been taught the way of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:17-24)?

9. What is the source of the Christian’s good behavior?

10. How does the church today teach the good conduct expected of those who believe in God through Christ?

11. What are some of the specific expressions of good conduct mentioned (Ephesians 4:25-5:7)?

12. What expressions of the Fruit of the Spirit can you discover in Ephesians 4:31-5:2?

13. How are inner attitudes and emotions connected to good behavior (Ephesians 4:31-5:2)?

14. Christians, prior to their faith in Christ, were “darkness” (Ephesians 5: 8). After surrendering to Christ we become “light in the Lord.” What do you think this means?

15. Paul gives specific directions on how to respond to darkness (Ephesians 5:11-13). What are the children of light supposed to do?



SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 7

Goodness | Ephesians 4:17-5:20

16. When have you had to face being light in the midst of darkness?

20. Jesus taught that “...a tree is recognized by its fruit” (Matthew 12:33). How would you describe the taste of the Fruit of Goodness in your church?

17. What does the Spirit have to do with being children of light (Ephesians 5:18-20)?

21. How would you describe the taste of goodness in your life?

18. Paul's advice might be described as “cultivate a musical heart” (Ephesians 5:19). How might having a musical heart be important in living a good life?

22. How would you describe the taste of goodness in your community?

23. How could you and your church make your community taste better?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

19. What is the Apostle Paul's solution for the battle of mixed motives (Romans 8:5,6), and how can you set your mind on what the Spirit desires (Philippians 4:8)?

Scripture for Meditation

How abundant are the good things that You have stored up for those who fear You, that You bestow in the sight of all, on those who take refuge in You.

Psalm 31:19



But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Galatians 5:22

Introduction

Faithfulness is the Fruit of the Spirit which makes us solid and dependable. We need each other. There is nothing worse than discovering that those you have depended upon have let you down and nothing better than knowing that you have family and friends you can depend on. Especially in quiet moments when there is time for reflection, there is nothing better than to know we have been there when someone needed us.

The Faithful God

One of the greatest comforts in life is to trust that God is faithful. One of the classic hymns of the Church celebrates His faithfulness. “All I have needed Thy hand hath provided; / Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!”

When Moses wanted to know what God was like, among the qualities God revealed is faithfulness. “And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness’” (Exodus 34:6). The psalmist loved to celebrate God’s faithfulness, “For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies” (Psalm 57:10). The apostle Paul greets the church in Corinth with this assurance, “God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful” (1 Corinthians 1:9).

The Hebrew word, *emunah*, translated faithfulness, means “firmness, steadiness, fidelity.” The Old Testament often uses this word to express the total dependability of God’s character and promises. “He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he” (Deuteronomy 32:4).”

One of the central ideas in both the Old and New Testaments is *covenant*—an agreement that binds together in common commitments. Implicit in the use of covenants is the expectation of faithfulness. The good news is that God is faithful and can be trusted to keep His covenants. God made a covenant with Noah never to destroy the earth by means of water (Genesis 9:11), a promise He has kept. Later God made a covenant with Abraham to give him the land and to bless his descendents (Genesis 15:12-21) when as yet Abraham had no children at all; a covenant which He also has kept. The greatest covenant of all is the New Covenant which God makes with us through Jesus to forgive our sins and give us the gift of life (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:15). We rest in this new covenant for the challenges of this life and for the anticipation of all that is to come because of the faithfulness of God.

Covenant Breakers

The not-so-good-news is that we humans have a miserable track record of being unfaithful. In contrast to God the Rock, the author of Deuteronomy comments on Israel’s faithlessness, “They have acted corruptly toward him; to their shame they are no longer his children, but a warped and crooked generation” (Deuteronomy 32:5).

The root of our faithlessness runs deep. At the heart of the human race is a soft core that is the opposite of the rock hard faithful character of God. When Satan tempted Adam and Eve, he

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

characterized God as mean, controlling, and stingy (Genesis 3:4). By their actions, we see that Adam and Eve readily agreed with this caricature of God. Instead of being faithful to their Creator, they were treacherously unfaithful and disloyal. Their disobedience, eating from the Tree of Good and Evil, was merely the logical fruit of their faithlessness.

A world full of faithless people is a dangerous world. Describing a faithless world estranged from God the Apostle Paul writes, “They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice... (they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy)” (Romans 1:28-31). The Greek word translated as *faithless* in this text also can be translated as “untrustworthy.” Not keeping faith is the source of great pain. Nations go to war over the violation of treaties. Legal systems are consumed with broken commitments and contracts. And of course, marriages and families are destroyed when husbands and wives do not keep faith with each other.

Jesus is Faithful

Whereas Adam and Eve were faithless when confronted with denial and deceit, Jesus, when tempted by Satan, keeps faith. He refused to provide bread for Himself (Luke 4:4); refused to worship Satan in exchange for power (Luke 4:8), and refused to put God to the test concerning His own protection from harm (Luke 4:12).

In reflecting on the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, it is especially striking to contrast the two gardens of Scripture, the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane. In Gethsemane, Jesus experienced deep pain concerning His upcoming death; He preferred to abandon the cross if He could, “Take this cup from me” (Mark 14:36). However, despite His reticence, Jesus is willing to keep His commitment “Yet not what I will, but what You will.” By this act of faithfulness, Jesus, the Son of Man, the heir of Adam, corrects the original faithlessness of the first Garden.

The source of Jesus’ faithfulness was His trust in the faithfulness of His Father. As He faced a gruesome death on the cross, He trusted that God would raise Him from the dead. On Easter, God kept His commitment and a new world began. Jesus’ trust in the faithfulness of the Father opened the door of new life for the rest of us.

Living Faithfully

Life is filled with unjust transactions, physical, emotional and spiritual pain, and unfortunate circumstances. No one is immune and there is no way that we can completely protect ourselves. Knowing that God is faithful, demonstrated for all the world to see in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, encourages us to trust when we are tempted to wonder if God has let us down.

When the first Christians began to experience persecution, some began to doubt the faithfulness of God. Peter gives comfort to his readers who were suffering persecution, “So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good” (1 Peter 4:19). The book of Hebrews was written to those who were tempted to give up. Instead the author encourages them, “Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23). No matter what we face, God has promised to support us. The Apostle Paul writes, “God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what

The master replied, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.”

Matthew 25:23

you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

This trust in the faithfulness of God is contagious. When we are around those who, in the midst of difficulties, are confident that God is faithful, then we find ourselves inclined to trust as well. An essay written for the NPR radio program, *All Things Considered*, and read on August 7, 2006 by Betsy Chalmers, is an inspiration to faithfulness. Her husband of two years committed a violent crime and was imprisoned. For the next 30 years, she remained faithful to him, visiting weekly in prison and calling him a couple of times a week. In her concluding paragraph, she writes, “At 50, I have come to the conclusion it is not the life I have that defines me, it is the way I choose to live that life. I choose to live it being faithful. This brings me peace, this allows me to have joy, this keeps me aware of my husband. My spiritual faith has given me the foundation to live this life, not just survive it. Faith in a God who has not abandoned me; faith in a man who loves me; faith in myself. I believe in faithfulness.”

God is faithful—we can trust Him. God is faithful—He wants us to be trustworthy. In a world filled with threats of terror and in a culture that is changing rapidly, there are many unsettled people facing a great deal of uncertainty. Christians bearing the Fruit of Faithfulness can make a difference. Churches comprised of faithful people can be pillars of strength in their communities. In our homes, with our friends, in our places of work, we can be that solid stable presence that others can depend upon. The key is that we must choose to do what is right rather than what is comfortable or convenient; like God, we must keep our commitments. Mother Teresa put her finger on our challenge when she said, “I seek not to be successful, but to be faithful.”

Spending Time With God

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SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 8

Faithfulness | Rev 2:8-13; Matt 25:14-30; Hosea 2:8-3:5

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about this Fruit of the Spirit for which you are especially thankful to God.

3. Look up the following passages from Proverbs and write down your reflections on the rewards of faithfulness.

Proverbs 3:3-4

Proverbs 16:6

Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue this study.

2. Look up these passages from Psalms and record your thoughts about the faithfulness of God.

Psalms 57:10

Proverbs 20:28

Psalms 61:7

4. Read the words of Jesus to a church facing difficulties and challenges in Revelation 2:8-11. The church at Smyrna, in Asia Minor, was under religious pressure from “false Jews” and spiritual pressure from the devil, Revelation 2: 9-10. How does Jesus encourage them?

Psalms 71:22

5. What might Jesus say if this letter were written to your church?

Psalms 117:2



SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 8

Faithfulness | Rev 2:8-13; Matt 25:14-30; Hosea 2:8-3:5

6. What does “keeping the faith” mean for the Christians at Smyrna (Revelation 10-11)? What might this mean for Christians at your church?

10. When the master returns there is an accounting. How does he show approval to the servants who please him (Matthew 25:21, 23)?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

7. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.

11. In what ways were they faithful?

8. Jesus teaches His disciples about faithfulness. Read Matthew 25:14-30. As the master leaves on a long journey, he entrusts resources to three servants (vv. 14-15). What does he expect from them?

12. Why do you think that the master's response to the servant with one bag of gold was so harsh (Matthew 25:26-30)?

9. What resources has Jesus given to you? What do you think Jesus expects of you?

13. In what way was he unfaithful?

14. What image does the third servant have of his master (Matthew 25:24-25)?



SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 8

Faithfulness | Rev 2:8-13; Matt 25:14-30; Hosea 2:8-3:5

15. How does our image of Jesus affect the way we serve Him?

18. In what areas are God's people in our time and culture tempted to be unfaithful to God? In what areas do you struggle to be faithful to God?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

Shallow relationships characterize our culture. Job transfers from city to city expand our contacts but keep our roots shallow. It is easy to think about finding new friends when we run into problems with our current ones. God isn't like that. As we see from the book of Hosea, God Hosea makes commitments for both time and eternity.

16. How would you describe the spiritual condition of Israel (Hosea 2:8–3:5)?

19. God tells Hosea to reclaim his unfaithful wife (3:1-5) as a metaphor of God's restoration of His people. What is their new relationship going to be like (2:19-3:5)?

17. God describes Israel's restoration in terms of marriage because He views idolatry as spiritual adultery. Why does God use such a graphic term?

Scripture for Meditation

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess,
for He who promised is faithful.

Hebrews 10:23



But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Galatians 5:22

Introduction

The fruit of gentleness is a theological and spiritual surprise—not many people think of God as gentle.

In the New Testament, there are two words which are translated as gentle. One is the word *praus*. It is used to indicate a mild, soothing quality, a quality that is to be expected in friends, benevolent rulers, tame animals, and mild medications. The other word, *epieikes* originally indicated a thoughtful, considerate, and decent outlook. Rather than hotly demanding his or her rights whatever the cost to others, a person with this trait seeks peace in a calm way. Both meek and gentle are seen as opposites of an angry harshness that grows out of personal pride and a dominating selfishness. Both Greek words *praus* and *epieikes* are sometimes translated as meek, sometimes as gentle, depending on the context. Both words refer to a character quality which blends both strength and humility.

The Gentleness of God

It is not unusual for people to think that there are very different views of God contained in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament image of God is often that of a shouting, angry, old man upset with us for breaking His rules. The New Testament image, in contrast, is that of a loving God revealed in Jesus Christ who taught the supreme importance of love. However, under our careful examination, these conflicting views of God melt away.

If there was ever a time when God would shout in anger, certainly it would be at the initial corruption of His world. Once more, let's turn to Genesis. After their sin, God arrives on the scene and finds Adam and Eve hiding in shame. Instead of shouting words of accusation and condemnation, God asks questions: "Where are you" (Genesis 3:9)? "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from" (3:11-12)? And, "What is this you have done" (3:13)? Only after God finds out the details does He pronounce the consequences. The divine manner is quiet, reasoned, and spoken in a way that does not shame or humiliate. While God is firm and specific, He is also gentle. Amazingly, while Adam and Eve attempted to cover their shame by hiding in the bushes, it is God who provides a covering, "The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21).

God is gentle and He makes Himself known in gentleness. When the prophet Elijah seeks God, he encounters God, not in a raging storm, but in a gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:12). God's Messiah, promised through the prophet Isaiah, will be tender and gentle. "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" (Isaiah 42:1-3a).

This gentleness of God does not mean that He will never get angry with us. He is no push over. But His gentleness means that He restrains His anger (remember the spiritual fruit of patience?) and when He does execute justice, He does so with caring compassion.

As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.

1 Thessalonians 2:6b-7

The Gentleness of Jesus

Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15) and we look at Him if we want to know what God is like. We don't have to look long to see the gentle power of God. When Jesus reaches out His hand to touch the leper (Luke 5:15), raises a little girl from the dead and restore her to distraught parents (Mark 5:40-42) or assures a desperate women healed of a chronic bleeding tumor (Mark 5:25-34), He is both powerful and tender. Even when Jesus rebukes the disciples for their consistent lack of faith, He does so with gentleness as He describes them as "little-faith" (Matthew 6:30).

Perhaps the most obvious display of His gentle character is displayed on Palm Sunday. Having proclaimed the kingdom of God for three years, it looks like D-Day has finally arrived, and He was making His move for power as He rides into the capitol city of Jerusalem, hailed by the crowds. Pontius Pilate would have entered with chariots drawn by war horses. However, Jesus assumes the role of the Messiah from the prophets, "See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9b). He chooses the donkey as a "victory steed" to demonstrate that He is going to bring a regime change different from every other revolution in human history. Instead of power over power, and might makes right, Jesus consummates His kingdom through a cross. His rule is to be one of gentleness, not of ruthless cruelty and domination.

Like God His Father, Jesus' gentleness does not mean He is passive in the face of corruption. He is grieved and even furious with the hard-hearted religious leaders (Mark 3:5) and He confronts them. The day after riding into Jerusalem He goes into the temple with a whip and cleans it out. "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" (Mark 11:17).

Presently, the world is a place of turmoil and pain. Jesus is the door, the way to one who is the solution to all our problems. Compassionately, kindly, gently, Jesus extends a warm welcome to all who will respond, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29).

Chivalry Rediscovered

We don't think of God as gentle nor is gentleness a character trait many aspire to today. "You sir are no gentleman" is no longer an insult as it once was in Victorian England. However it might be wise to revisit the concept of gentleman for Christians today, both for men and woman.

In the tumultuous Middle Ages when war between kings and nobles was to be expected with the coming of spring, the Church managed to blend together the qualities of courage with gentleness in the ideal of chivalry. Recommending the recovery of chivalry for the ills of modern society, C. S. Lewis observes, "If we cannot produce Lancelots, humanity falls into two sections—those who can deal in blood and iron, but cannot be "meek in the hall", and those who are "meek in the hall," but useless in battle—for the third class, who are both brutal in peace and cowardly in war, need not here be discussed" (Present Concerns, p. 15).

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you...

2 Corinthians 10:1a

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Ephesians 4:2

Christians are to bear the fruit of gentleness. As His Church, we are to “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2) Pastors especially should show gentleness. “The Lord’s servant must not quarrel ...Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth...” (2 Timothy 2:24, 25). In our witness to the world, Peter admonishes Christians, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

When we catch a vision of this gentle side of God’s character, whatever fear or anxiety we may have about Him can be transformed into a respectful gratitude and a channel for tender spiritual intimacy. We don’t have to be afraid of His displeasure or fear a harsh reaction to our failures. If we sit in quiet and lift our hearts to God, it is possible to sense an affectionate and tender presence. And if God is gentle with us, then we too can be gentle with ourselves when we fail to live up to our own expectations.

Once a community of Christians catches a vision of God’s gentleness and meekness it is transformed into a safe place in which we are freed to face ourselves and our problems with deeper levels of grace and kindness. Surely if God is gentle with us, we can be gentle with one another.

In a world of terrorism and religious fundamentalism, religion is increasingly perceived as aggressive and violent. More than ever, the world needs to know that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, while just, does not yell or inflict His anger upon us, for this is not God’s character or His way. It will be a refreshing surprise in this violent world to show that both God and His people are gentle.

Spending Time With God

This 10 week study series, “The Fruit of the Spirit,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 9

Gentleness | 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down insights about the fruit of gentleness for which you are especially thankful to God.

Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue this study.

2. Why is it wise to be gentle?

Proverbs 15:1,4

Proverbs 25:15

3. The promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, referred to as God's servant by the prophet Isaiah, will be gentle (Isaiah 42:1-3). What do you learn about gentleness from these verses?

4. How do you respond to the gentleness of God?

5. How might viewing God as gentle affect your relationship with Him?

6. Jesus declares that He is gentle and humble, and invites us to bring our burdens to him (Matthew 11:28-30). Take a few moments to list what burdens you and then write a prayer giving your burdens to Him.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

7. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.



SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 9

Gentleness | 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

8. Paul's words are gentle and demonstrate humility, courtesy and considerateness. How are these qualities evident in the Apostle Paul's words to the church at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:1-7)?

12. In contrast to defensiveness, there is a tone of tender care. How do the references to young children and mothers, (1 Thessalonians 2:7) and father (1 Thessalonians 2:11) convey the idea of gentleness?

9. To be gentle requires a reservoir of strength in the face of difficult circumstances. What challenges did Paul face?

13. When have you experienced gentleness in the Church?

10. How do you see strength present in Paul's words?

14. Who comes to mind when you think of a "gentle" person? How did/does being around that person affect you?

11. What reasons might Paul have had to be defensive?

15. How do you think your family and friends would rate your gentleness?



SERIES

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | CULTIVATING A HEART FOR GOD

LESSON 9

Gentleness | 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

16. What would need to change in your life for you to grow in the spiritual fruit of gentleness?

20. In a world mixed with both goodness and injustice, what problems would we face if God never confronted us?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

17. Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday in fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets (Matthew 21:1-17). How does this passage convey the idea of gentle strength?

22. How can you incorporate the gentle strength of Jesus into your life?

18. How does it convey the idea of gentle justice?

19. What does the contrast between the praises of the children and the objections of the leaders show about the leaders? What does it show about Jesus?

Scripture for Meditation

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:29



But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Galatians 5:22

Introduction

Little in life can be achieved without discipline: without discipline we won't pay our bills on time, we will over-eat, under exercise and continually miss deadlines. Those who handle the greatest levels of responsibility are those who consistently demonstrate the greatest discipline.

Self-control is an important expression of the Christian faith—actually one of the unique manifestations of Christian spirituality. In the Greco-Roman world of the first century, the divine spirit was thought to make its presence known by causing an unusual ecstatic behavior, a kind of whirling dervish frenzy in which the worshiper, in a trance, lost contact with the world. In contrast, the presence of the Spirit of Jesus Christ creates an order and harmony, both within the soul and within the community. Those who have God's Spirit are tempered, focused, and in touch with themselves and the needs of those around them.

Self-control is the last fruit listed of the Spirit for good reason—you need all the others to do it. Just as love is the first fruit of the Spirit from which all the other manifestations of the fruit grow, so self-control is the final fruit in which all the other fruit culminate. To continue with the metaphor of fruit, self-control is the highest fruit on the tree. Or to change metaphors, self-control is the tip of the iceberg. To change the metaphor once again, it is the last step on the ladder.

The Greek words for “self-control” are *enkrateia* and *enkrates*. They mean “to have power over oneself” and thus to be able to hold oneself in. Those without self-control are *akrasia* or *akrates*. They are powerless, overwhelmed by the passions that tug at and control them. Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and religious leaders because they have the appearance of control outwardly. However, they are hypocrites because inwardly “they are full of greed and self-indulgence (*akrasia*)” (Matthew 23:25). Paul says the ultimate degenerate character of sin is shown in those who are “without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control (*akrasia*), brutal, not lovers of the good...” (2 Timothy 3:3).

Self-Control Versus Self-Determination

In the first study on the Fruit of the Spirit, there was a distinction made between the exercise of will power and self-determination. What's the difference between self-control and self-determination? Only spiritually rich people can express self-control. Spiritually impoverished people cannot. Spiritually rich people can sustain social harmony over an extended period of time. Spiritually impoverished people who lack self-control show fits of will power that come and go with fits and starts of determination which soon peter out.

The first Christians struggled to understand and live by means of a Spirit empowered self-control. A movement grew up in the first several centuries called the Encratites, from the Greek word *enkrateia*. The Encratites tended to reject the use of wine and meat. Often marriage was repudiated. They were not necessarily heretical, but they were always in danger of going too far in the exercise of discipline and self-restraint.

Paul warned against getting caught up in religious behaviors of self-denial and self-affliction in the name of self-control. He wrote to the Christians at Colossae, “Such regulations indeed have

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

James 1:26

an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (Colossians 2:23).

Self-Control and Spiritual Discipline

However, while we can't generate self-control by will power, there is definitely a place for the exercise of our wills in the expression of self-control. Peter, in his second letter, brings out this other side. He begins his letter by affirming that God's power has given us all the resources we need for a godly life (2 Peter 1:3). And then, he goes on, “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith...” and what follows in 2 Peter 1:5-7 parallels the character qualities of Paul's list of the Fruit of the Spirit. So, bearing the fruit effort does require effort on our part; it's the right kind of effort that matters—one that draws on the power of God within us.

There is a long history of the use of spiritual disciplines in the Church which did manage a healthy blend of effort with spiritual dependence. Beginning in the 4th and 5th century, a movement of spiritually intense people headed out to the deserts of Egypt and Palestine. They sought to live simple lives devoted to prayer and memorization of Scripture. Although there were silly excesses, communities of spiritual athletes (ascetics), developed spiritual disciplines which thoughtfully cultivated the Fruit of the Spirit. Their influence has come down through the ages even into the 21st century.

Spiritual disciplines sometimes have been overused and abused; sometimes they have fallen into disuse. Yet properly cultivated spiritual disciplines have been a source of much power and godliness. The author of *The Spiritual Discipline Handbook* writes, “From its beginning the church linked the desire for more of God to intentional practices, relationships and experiences that gave people space in their lives to ‘keep company’ with Jesus. These intentional practices, relationships and experiences we know as spiritual disciplines. The basic rhythm of disciplines (or rule) for the first believers is found in Acts 2:42...” (Calhoun p. 17). The initial disciplines included teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. Over time many other disciplines were developed depending on the need. Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* lists 13 classic disciplines. *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* lists 62 for our day!

The Fruit of the Spirit Versus the Fruit of the Flesh

Paul wrote up his list of the Fruit of the Spirit to challenge the Galatian church. The whole church was filled with conflict, they were “biting and devouring each other” (Galatians 5:15). The social chaos in the church was a clear indication that they were not living by the Spirit and so were producing the fruit of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). In short, they were a group of spiritually immature Christians who were out of control; probably not unlike a classroom of children whose teacher has been out of the room too long.

The Christian church in many places reflects the conflicted character of the Galatian church. Even where churches are not splitting, there is often underlying tension between individuals and/or groups which seek to be self-filled, not Spirit-filled. Instead of grapes in a cluster hanging together in our connection with Christ, we are isolated balls on a pool table that crash into each

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

James 1:19b

other as we bounce around the table.

What Paul wanted for the church at Galatia to experience was a spiritual community characterized by the nine different expressions of the Spirit. When all nine are present there will be social harmony.

This organic, intimate, spiritual connection that bears fruit is very strange to us. Not only our fallen human nature, but also our culture encourages us to be self-centered and independent. We believe that hard work, determination, and a good strategy will make us successful people. So it is counter-intuitive for us to turn to God when we find a personal incapacity or lack of competence. But it is just this self-centeredness that makes living together as the Church so difficult.

The Fruit of Jesus Christ

Self-control and all the Fruit of the Spirit are manifestations of the presence of God within us. If you haven't made the connection yet, as we finish this study, then you need to see clearly that the Fruit of the Spirit are the character qualities of God. It is Jesus who is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and who exercises self-control. When He is manifesting His life through us, then we get the privilege of bearing the fruit of His character—the Fruit of His Spirit.

Jesus told the disciples “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me” (John 15:4a). If we are struggling with self-control or any fruit of the Spirit then the first place we must look is towards our connection with God. If we ask, we can be confident that God will receive us. The more time we spend with Him, the more we can expect to see His character formed within us and His fruit borne through us.

Let us cultivate the Fruit of the Spirit, let us turn to God. Jesus invites us, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Spending Time With God

This 10 week study series, “The Fruit of the Spirit,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about the fruit of self-control for which you are especially thankful to God.

Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue this study.

2. Why is it wise to exercise self-control?

Proverbs 23:20-21

Proverbs 23:29-35

Proverbs 28:7

3. There are a number of different areas over which we need to exercise self-control. Most of us do better in a couple of areas and do poorly in others. How would you rate yourself?

Click on or circle one box in each area: 1=poor, 3=okay, 5=great

finances	1	2	3	4	5
bodys	1	2	3	4	5
desires	1	2	3	4	5
appetites	1	2	3	4	5
tongue	1	2	3	4	5

4. Write a prayer asking God to work His character into your character so that you may live a spiritually disciplined life.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Begin by sharing your thoughts and insights from the commentary and your personal study.

6. According to James, why is control over our tongues so important (James 3:1-12)?

7. How does James use the metaphors of animals and fire, among other things, to make his point?

8. There is something of an incongruity in the way that Christians use their tongues, what is it ?



9. Now, let's get practical and specific: consider your church. As a congregation, how well is the tongue under control?

14. What impact does your lack of self-control have on your prayer life?

10. Consider yourself; how appropriately tempered is your speech?

15. How might an increase in self-control enhance your prayer life?

11. The tongue can be either destructive or constructive. Give an example of how you have been helped by encouraging words.

16. Addicts are those who have become slaves to their appetites. What is James' solution to the problem of addiction?

12. Like Paul in Galatians, James addresses conflicts in the Church. What happens when we don't control our appetites (James 4:1-10)?

17. Have you or someone you know, ever experienced deliverance from a controlling desire through surrender to God? What happened?

13. According to James, self-control harness and directs great amounts of power. What have you been able to achieve through self-control?

18. How has this study motivated you to deeper levels of surrender to God?



Digging Deeper (Further Study)

19. How does Jesus exercise self-control in the following passages?

Luke 4:4-12

Mark 14:32-35

Mark 15:16-20

Hebrews 12:1-11

20. How does the example of Jesus help encourage you to grow in self-control?

21. How do hardships help us grow in self-control?

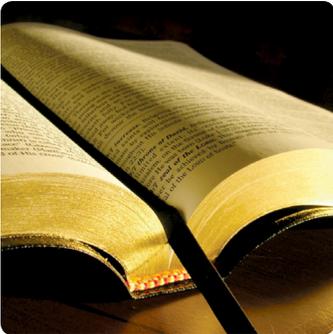
22. What experiences have you had which increased your self-control?

23. How might your life be even richer if you grew in self-control?

Scripture for Meditation

Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city.

Proverbs 16:32



BNEXT Small Group Leader's Guide

This BNEXT Leader's Guide is for facilitator/leaders. Please read this information before you begin. As the facilitator of a small group, you will have the experience of not only sharing this journey through God's Word with others but of aiding them along the way. You do not need previous experience or special training to lead a group. (Your primary responsibility is to serve as facilitator, not to teach.)

MATERIALS NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE

- Either the electronic version or a printed copy for each participant. (The electronic version of this BNEXT Study can be printed. When printed, the blue boxes that were visible in the electronic version will print as blank spaces for participants to record their answers.)
- Bible for each participant, preferably the same version (these studies use the NIV)
- Pen or pencil for each participant
- Watch or clock to monitor time

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This BNEXT study series is versatile and may be used by individuals, small groups, or even entire congregations. The use of a small group as part of the program will enhance each one's experience. BNEXT studies have successfully been used in a variety of environments, including home groups, churches, prisons, and businesses.

These lessons are designed for the individual to read the Scripture passages, read the three pages of commentary, and answer the questions throughout the week. The participants then attend a weekly meeting with the small group to share insights and discuss the material. Total time for each weekly lesson should be about 1 to 1½ hours in length. Suggested lesson plans with timing guidelines are found at the end of this Guide.

If you use this study in a large group or an entire church, there are two possible approaches. One approach is for the entire group to first gather for a welcome and opening prayer, after which participants can meet in small groups for discussion using the BNEXT questions. After a specified amount of time, all would reconvene into a larger setting to present highlights from each group, and for closing words of encouragement and prayer. The other approach is to begin together as a larger group for a welcome and then split into smaller groups for the remainder of the time/lesson.

ABOUT SMALL GROUPS

Group Size: Experience has shown that a group size of 10–12 people works best. If your group is significantly larger, we suggest that you create additional small groups.

Group Leaders: Each group should have its own facilitator/leader. It is good to also have at least one back-up facilitator in case the primary facilitator is absent. If you have several groups meeting at one time, decide who will be responsible for facilitating the larger group gatherings for the welcome time and so forth.

ABOUT FACILITATOR/LEADERS

These lessons are designed to easily be used by a first-time leader as well as an experienced leader. The ideal small group facilitator/leader should have:

- a hunger for God's Word and a deep desire to see others grow in their knowledge of God and His Word,
- a commitment to the group, emphasizing seeing the program through to the end,
- the ability to facilitate and moderate discussion rather than teach, and
- a willingness to follow the "Discussion Group Rules of Engagement" (found in this Leader's Guide).

As facilitator, pray for your small group. Spend time preparing your own lesson (you should attempt to answer all of the questions before the class) and be thinking about how to present the questions to the group. Group members should be encouraged to at least answer the first two sets of questions — Devotion (Personal Study) and Discussion (Small Group Study) questions — before each class, to enhance their learning experience. Even better, encourage them to find time to complete Digging Deeper (Further Study) questions on their own. One of the goals of this approach is to encourage participants to develop the habit of delving into Scripture and studying on a regular basis.

You are not expected to be a Biblical expert. You are a facil-

itator, so resist the attempt to teach. You are there to guide the group, keep them on track, and avoid getting caught up in doctrinal debates. If you want to facilitate the group with a broadened background knowledge, see our "Background Study Option" below.

Recognize that not everyone is comfortable answering questions. Gently keep discussion going by asking questions like, "Does anyone else have something to add?" It can be helpful at times to have a volunteer read Scripture texts that are referred to in the questions.

Recognize and affirm all who contribute to the discussion. Do not dismiss someone's answer as wrong. If an answer is obviously off-base, thank them for their answer, then ask what others think. Remind the group to let Scripture interpret Scripture.

If you feel that a certain statement or question is inappropriate for your group, you may omit it or at least recognize that not everyone needs to answer it. However, do not be afraid of letting the group tackle tough topics.

BACKGROUND STUDY OPTIONS

Again, facilitators are not expected to be Biblical experts. If the group looks to you for an answer you do not have, it is perfectly fine to say, "I'm not sure. Perhaps we can all think about that one and bring it up again next week?" Or, "Let's bring this one up to the larger group when there is time allotted for such discussion." Or, "Let's see if this doesn't answer itself over the weeks as we continue our study. Remember, the Bible interprets itself."

For extra study, you may wish to approach your pastor or to read commentaries and use other resources. The internet contains a wealth of information ... and also disinformation. Some internet sites that provide reliable (and free) commentaries and articles include: biblegateway.com, biblestudytools.com, biblehub.com, and blueletterbible.org.

Another useful source of general Biblical knowledge is *The Essential Bible Companion*, by the same contributors of our *Bible*

in 90 Days study series: John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).

LEADING THE CLASS (Suggested Lesson Plans)

First Class

Decide where you want to meet weekly and decide on a time. Once this has been done, actively publicize the *BNEXT* study throughout all your circles — at your church, workplace, friends, family, etc. There are some free publicity aids on our website at ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/. (If the study is being done by the entire congregation, recruit facilitators for each group and have one facilitator designated to lead the closing session when all come back together.)

Be sure that every participant has downloaded the electronic version or has a printed copy of the study at least one week prior to the first small group meeting. Have everyone complete the first lesson's reading and answer the questions in preparation for the first gathering of the group(s).

The first class is unique in that a little more time is spent on introductions and explanations of how the classes will function.

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of members (13 minutes)

(NOTE: Entire church groups meet together for opening prayer only and then break into their small groups.)

 - a. Think of something brief each participant could say about themselves such as: "Tell us something unique about yourself." Or perhaps, "What do you hope to get out of this BNEXT study?"
 - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief (one minute or less).
2. Give an overview of the class and expectations (7 minutes)
 - a. Inform the class of how many weeks it will take to cover the study and the date of the last class.
 - b. Discuss the format of the BNEXT study and ask if

there are any questions.

- c. Review the "Rules of Engagement" which are located at the end of this Leader's Guide.
3. Discuss lesson questions (35 minutes)
 - a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that anyone would like to discuss with the group.
 - b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are provided to promote dialogue and conversation.
 - c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.

(NOTE: For an entire church, allow an extra 10-15 minutes to allow for the groups to come back together at a specified time. Allow each group to share a highlight of their small group discussion.)
 4. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
 - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
 5. If you are providing printed copies of lessons to participants, distribute the lesson for next week
 6. Dismissal

Subsequent Classes

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of any new participants (10 minutes)

(NOTE: Entire church groups meet together for opening prayer only and then break into their small groups.)

- a. If there are new members, have them introduce themselves. Remind them to be brief (one minute or less).
- b. Think of a good ice-breaker that somehow relates to the study. For example, if you are studying "The Ten

Commandments – Exodus 20,” you may ask, “Why do you think Exodus or the Ten Commandments are important?” Or, “How do the Ten Commandments relate to the cross of Jesus Christ?” Remind them to keep their answers short. Set a time limit for this opening section; not everyone needs to answer.

- c. If you think it's necessary, remind the group of the “Rules of Engagement” at the end of this Guide.

2. Discuss lesson questions (45 minutes)

- a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that people in the group would like to discuss.
- b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are designed to promote dialogue and conversation.
- c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.

(NOTE: For an entire church, allow an extra 10-15 minutes for the groups to come back together at a specified time. Allow each group to share an insight of their small group discussion.)

3. Closing prayer (5 minutes)

- a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
- b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.

5. Dismissal

SMALL GROUP RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

It is important to treat one another in Christian love. These “Rules of Engagement” will be helpful, so read them aloud during the first class; thereafter, refer to them as needed by the group.

1. Begin each reading/study session with prayer, expecting God to speak to you through His Word.

2. Come prepared for each week's session by completing the reading and the study questions.
3. Your small group will have a facilitator. Please be respectful of the facilitator's leadership.
4. The facilitator's responsibility is to guide or shepherd the discussions. Do not expect your facilitator to be an expert on Scripture — each group member should seek the answers from Scripture on his/her own.
5. Each group member is invited to join the discussion but should not feel required to do so. If called upon, it is okay to say, “Thank you, but I would prefer to pass on answering that question.”
6. Alternatively, do not dominate a discussion. Time is limited, so please be sensitive to everyone in the group to help ensure that each person has the opportunity to participate.
7. Respect everyone's answers and views on Scripture. However, let Scripture interpret Scripture and expect the Holy Spirit to speak/teach through His written Word.
8. In preparation for each lesson, you are not expected to do extra study or research. If you wish to dig deeper, then here are a few helpful resources:
 - Go to ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/ for key tips and guidelines for best use of BNEXT study series in your small group or whole church.
 - The internet contains a wealth of information (and sometimes disinformation). Some useful Bible study sites include: biblegateway.com, biblestudytools.com, biblehub.com, and blueletterbible.org.
 - *The Essential Bible Study Companion* (hard copy), by John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).