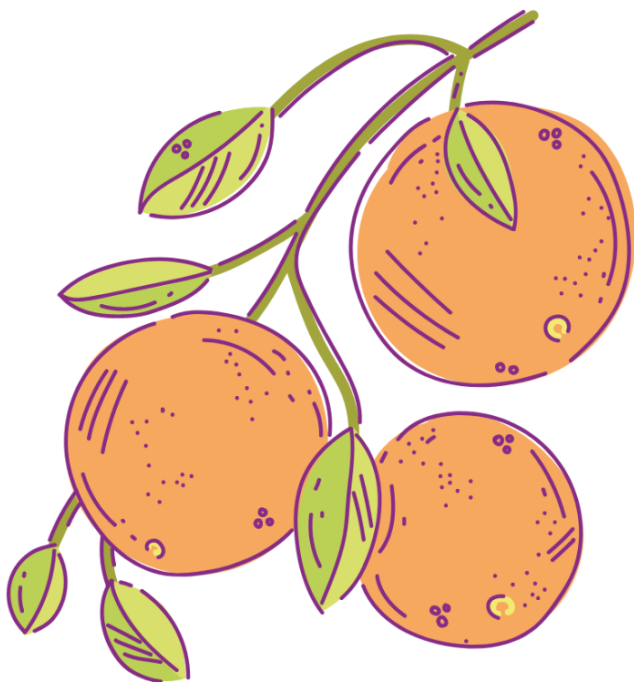




Living Fruitfully

A 12 DAY DEVOTIONAL STUDY ON
THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

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Introduction

Hello friend,

However you found this devotional, I'm glad you found it!

Living Fruitfully is a 12 day devotional on the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23. After briefly laying a foundation about dwelling in the Spirit and abiding in the True Vine (Jesus), each day we dive into a study on a fruit of the Spirit, like love or joy. We talk about how God Himself exemplifies that fruit, how we ourselves can cultivate that fruit, and the result of cultivating that fruit. The goal of the study is to encourage you to walk in the Spirit and show you that you are capable of living a fruitful life that draws others to Jesus. I pray that that is what you find here.

This devotional is not meant to be your sole time with Jesus for the day. This is meant to be read along with your quiet time in God's Word, because I promise the words in this book don't even come close to the active, living, powerful Word of God. Devotions are great but they are not sufficient in and of themselves to do the

deep heart work meant to be done during quiet time. However, maybe you *just* had a baby and you sleep 45 minutes each night. Maybe you are a new Christian and don't know where to start with quiet time but *want* to start. Maybe you have just started a new job and you are finding a new balance in life. Or, maybe you are a college student with a full class schedule and part time job and you want to meet with Jesus. That's okay, this is for you too. Because Jesus meets us where we are and can use anything to work on our hearts and encourage us. I pray that however you use this study that all you see is the love of Jesus.

You may be wondering, what's the best way to do this devotional? Here are some tips before you actually get started.

- Use this as a side dish and not the main entree.

Pick a book of the Bible to read (the Gospels are a great place to start!) and read a chapter, or half a chapter, every day. Once that is complete, pull out this devotion and complete a day! *Or*, take a 12 day break from your normal Bible reading and dig into this devotional.

- Use a journal.

At the end of each day, I have given you a few journal prompts. Take the time to journal out the answers to each prompt. This will solidify your understanding a bit and bury the truth in your heart a little deeper. There are also very simple questions scattered

throughout the reading portion, and a journal is a great way to answer them since this is an eBook!

- Work on the Scripture Memory

Scripture memory is an important discipline, as it is how we renew our minds. Use index cards or stick notes and write down each verse in the journal prompts, and over the next several weeks, spend time committing them to memory so that the Spirit can use them even when you aren't in quiet time!

- Don't forget to pray.

Prayer should be a part of our minute by minute lives, but giving over your burdens, worries, friends, family, joys, and heart to Jesus during your quiet time will give you the strength to face the day. He hears you, He loves you, and you need Him. I hope that you integrate a prayer time during your quiet time whether you read this devotion or not!

- Keep going!

After this devotion is over, keep going. Keep reading your Bible, digging deeper, and seeking the Lord. He wants your heart and He wants to teach you, grow you, and comfort you. Don't stop after day 12, keep going.

Alright friends! Let's dig into the Scripture and learn about how to cultivate a fruitful life!



Day 1: Dwelling in the Spirit

Today, please begin your study by reading Galatians 5:16-25.

In Galatians chapter 5, Paul is challenging His readers to not gratify the flesh, but instead walk in the Holy Spirit. If we are to live a fruitful life, we must abide in the True Vine. This is a concept we will dive more deeply into tomorrow, but the theme is clear here in Galatians chapter 5. We see that the Spirit and the flesh are at war with one another. The flesh keeps you from obeying the Spirit, and the Spirit keeps us from obeying the lust of the flesh. We as believers have a choice to make. Allow our flesh and sin to dictate our actions, or allow the Holy Spirit to divinely lead us? Today we are going to talk about the command to dwell in the Spirit, the result of walking in the flesh versus the result of walking in the Spirit, and why we as believers are capable of dwelling in the Spirit even when it seems that sin has a hold on us. I encourage you to take today's

study slowly and thoughtfully. Grab your journal and pen, and let's learn.

The Command to Walk in the Spirit

Let's reread Galatians 5:16-18.

We are clearly commanded in this passage to walk in the Spirit. Why? Walking in the Spirit is the *only* way to not give into the desires of our flesh. When we walk in the Spirit, He gives us HIS desires, while our own desires are abolished. While many of us try to have the best of both worlds, we simply cannot. We cannot have one foot walking in the flesh and on foot walking in the Spirit because they directly oppose one another. We have to make the choice. We can choose to walk by the flesh and have sinful fruit or we can choose to walk in the Spirit and produce righteous fruit. It is difficult to make the initial decision because we think that living in the flesh brings more joy and happiness, but as soon as we make the decision to walk in the Spirit, we are set free. See, walking in the flesh means slavery, walking in the Spirit means freedom. Did you know that people subconsciously sync their steps with the person they are walking with? You, without thinking, match the length of your steps to the person you are walking next to! If you are in relationship with

the Holy Spirit and committed to walking *with* him through life, your steps will align with His.

Question 1: Read Romans 7:18-25. What does Paul say dwells within our fleshly selves without the Holy Spirit?

The Fruit of Walking in the Flesh

Paul does not expect the Galatians to make a blind decision, but he clearly lays out what the fruit of walking in the flesh looks like. It doesn't look good. Read Galatians 5:19-21 again. Paul says it is clear what the works of the flesh are, anyone can see them. It is evident who is walking with the Spirit and who is not.

- Sexual immorality
- Impurity
- Sensuality
- Idolatry
- Sorcery
- Enmity
- Strife
- Jealousy
- Fits of anger
- Rivalries

- Dissensions
- Divisions
- Envy
- Drunkenness
- Orgies
- All things like this

Pretty grim looking list, right? Paul warns that those who do things like this, who walk in the flesh, who are a slave to their sin, they will *not* inherit the Kingdom of God. He does not say, “Well, if you are an alcoholic and are constantly fighting with your family, but you watch church from your couch on Sunday, then you’ll still inherit the Kingdom of God...” If you do any of these things, if you read a Proverb a day, if you go to church, if you give to the poor, you will not inherit the Kingdom of God because you are not walking in the Spirit. Walking in the Spirit can only happen with a fully repentant heart.

Question 2: Which of these mentioned do you struggle with the most? Maybe it isn’t listed here, but maybe there is a sinful fruit you struggle with. Write it down and commit to praying over it daily.

The Fruit of Walking in the Spirit

Thank the Lord that we have an alternative, and we no longer have to walk in the flesh and face the consequences of doing so. In verses 22-23, Paul tells us of the fruit of walking in the Spirit. It is much sweeter!

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-control

Instead of sexual immorality, rivalries, jealousy, or impurity, we will have love and patience and joy! When we make the choice to walk in the Spirit and deny our flesh, we can live fruitful lives, fruit that others will benefit from, fruit that others will also want for themselves. Fruit that glorifies God and not ourselves.

Question 3: Which of these fruits do you desire to grow more in your own life?

The Flesh is Dead

You may be thinking, “YES! I want to walk in the Spirit, I’ve tried, it’s so hard. How can I do this, how can I deny my flesh and choose the Spirit?” Paul does not leave us hanging. Paul is just like you and I, he also struggled with sin, he also had to make the choice between the Spirit and the Flesh. In verse 24, Paul reminds us that if we belong to Christ, if we choose the Spirit, our flesh is dead. Our passions and desires died on the cross with Christ. This is what empowers us to be able to walk in the Spirit instead of our flesh. It is not our own will or ability, it is that Christ made the ultimate sacrifice. When He made that sacrifice, He set us free from our flesh so that we *could* walk in the Spirit. When we choose the Spirit, the Spirit enables us to walk with Him. Though it is challenging, know that you are no longer a slave to sin but set free in Christ. You do not have to accept the fruit of the flesh, because the Spirit will help you cultivate the fruit of righteousness. In this study we will discuss each of the fruit of the Spirit so that we can all begin to cultivate fruitful lives and walk in the Spirit

Question 4: What passions and desires do you need to surrender today to begin living fruitfully?



Journal Prompts

Prayer: Ask the Lord to reveal sins in your life that may be preventing you from living fruitfully. Surrender these sins and ask the Lord to help you walk with the Spirit.

Praise: Thank the Lord today for dying for your sins and crucifying your flesh. Thank Him for giving you new life in the Spirit.

Promise: Write Galatians 5:24-25 on an index card and carry it with you today. Meditate on the fact that your flesh was crucified with Christ and no longer has power over you.

Practical Action: Write down the fruit of the Spirit that you feel you lack the most. Find a scripture about that fruit to commit to memory.



Day 2: Abiding in the True Vine

Let's begin today's study by reading John 15:1-17

When you google the definition of abide, you find that it means to accept or act in accordance with, or to live or dwell. In Galatians 5, Paul tells us that we are to walk in step with the Spirit. How do we do that? We first must abide. We must accept, walk in accordance with, and live in the True Vine, Jesus Christ. In John 15, Jesus paints us a picture of vines and a vinedresser. He tells us how the vines that do not bear fruit are cut away and burned, and vines that do bear fruit are pruned, so that they may bear even more fruit. Once a branch is cut away, it no longer bears fruit because it no longer lives in the Vine. The same is true of us. We cannot bear the fruits of the Spirit Paul talks about until we abide in the True Vine that Jesus talks about. Let's dig a little deeper.

Abiding in the Source of Life (verses 1-4)

We as believers must abide, dwell, live in the source of our life, which is Jesus Christ. Yes, He set us free through His death on the cross, but it does not stop there. He wants us to abide in Him while His Spirit abides in us. Jesus is our life giver. He is the vine that we (the branches) are attached to. His roots reach down into the deep, nourishing soil, while ours reach into Him.

God is the vinedresser. This means that He is the one who cuts, prunes, and trains the branches of the vine so that they are producing as much good fruit as possible. We who proclaim Christ are the branches. The Vinedresser's job is to cut off the branches that are taking nutrients from the vine but aren't producing any fruit. These branches are usually not true believers, but those who falsely proclaim Christ without having ever surrendered to Him. You can tell who these people are because they don't produce fruit. They aren't loving, patient, gentle, or kind. They don't grow and change.

The second job of the vinedresser is to prune and train the branches that are fruitful. These are believers who truly love the Lord, who are seeking to be more like Christ. This is still a painful process, as the Vinedresser has to cut away anything that is hindering growth. The Vinedresser will also tie the branches, so that

they grow in the right direction. It doesn't seem pleasant, but it is necessary in order for the branches to produce *more* fruit.

Jesus paints this picture for us because He wants us to understand that we cannot bear good fruit unless we are living in and attached to the Source of Life, the True Vine. Another picture of this is a bouquet of flowers. The florist cuts them, arranges them beautifully, and sets them in nice, cool, nourishing water. Then we buy them, trim the stems a bit more, and set them in more fresh water. The flowers are beautiful and we enjoy them for a while, but eventually they wilt and we have to throw them out. They were not attached to the plant, the source of their life, so they wilted and died. However, when the flowers remain attached to the main plant that has roots reaching down into moist, rich soil, they will bloom year after year. The same is true of believers. If we are not attached and abiding in Christ, we will wilt and be thrown out. But if we walk in accordance with Him, we will produce fruit year after year.

Question 1: Where does John 15:4 say we must abide in order to bear fruit?

The Result of Abiding VS. Not Abiding (Verses 5-8)

In this passage, we see the end of each decision. We see that when we abide in Christ, the True Vine, we bear *much* fruit. We as humans are incapable of doing anything without Christ, and we especially cannot bear fruit without Him. When we submit to God's word and obey His commands, our prayers are fruitful, and God is glorified. When we abide and bear fruit, others see our faith is *real*. They get curious, they ask questions, they learn of Christ, and God is glorified. The end result of abiding in Christ is the glorification of our Holy God, and that is exactly what He created us to do. When we abide in the True Vine, we are able to fulfill the ultimate will of God in our lives.

In contrast, Jesus, in John 15:6, also explains the result of *not* abiding in Him. The vinedresser cuts off the vines that don't bear fruit, they are thrown out and burned. When we reject Christ and the invitation to abide in Him, He also rejects us.

Question 2: In John 15:8, what does Jesus say we must do to prove we are His disciples?

What Does Abiding in the True Vine Look Like? (9-11)

You may be thinking, “Okay, I definitely want to abide in the True Vine and glorify God with my life. What does that even look like, though? How do I do it?” This is what makes God’s Word so cool and fun to read! Jesus does not leave us hanging, and He explains exactly what it looks like to abide in Him.

We read earlier that the definition of abide means to live in or accept. In order to abide in Christ we must accept and abide in His love for us. We must live in the belief that *Jesus loves us (verse 9)*. Secondly, in order to abide in Christ, we must obey His commands (verse 10). Jesus gives Himself as an example to us. He obeys His heavenly Father, and we in turn must obey Him. Christ abides in the love of His Father, and we must abide in the love of Christ. Lastly, Christ tells us all of these things so that we can have His joy. We must live in the joy Christ gives us. Christ wants us to have joy, and in order to experience joy we must abide in Him and obey His word. His joy is full and true and lasting.

Question 3: Take a moment and write 1-2 things that bring you joy when you are abiding in Christ.

Abiding in Christ means Loving Others (verses 12-17)

Abiding in Christ means loving others. This goes underneath our previous point about what it looks like to abide in Christ, but this is so important that Jesus spends the next few verses expanding and emphasizing how important it is to love others. Loving others is a command, it is actually the second greatest command in the entire Bible (after loving God). Abiding in the love of Christ means obeying him, and obeying Him means loving others.

How can we love others? In verse 13 Jesus says that the greatest way we can love someone else is through sacrifice, laying down our lives for someone else. This is *exactly* how Jesus loves us. He came to earth and died a painful death on the cross for us, because He loves us. Sacrificing, whether it's time, money, or anything else, is how we best reflect the love Jesus has for us to others. If you want to abide in Christ, you must love others through sacrifice.

Another sweet result of abiding in Christ through obedience and loving others is that we can then have friendship/relationship with God (verse 14). Obedience to God keeps us connected to Him. God has revealed His will to us and this changes the relationship. Before He revealed His will through Scripture, man was simply to

obey God. Servants don't know the whole plan or why the master tells them what to do, they simply obey. However, Jesus has relayed everything to us that God wanted us to know. We know why we serve God, we know what He wants from us, and we know the outline of His major plan. This is why we are His friends and not *just* His servants.

Let's close out today's study here: God *chose us* to be a part of the Vine (verse 16). We did not decide to join the vine, but God looked at us and said "Yes! I want *you* to bear fruit!" It is a part of His will for us to abide in Him, and we are appointed to bear fruit. Just as He designed grape vines to bear grapes, He designed *us* to bear love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. He chose to listen and hear our prayers. Friend, you are *chosen by God to bear fruit, therefore you are fully capable of surrendering your flesh and bearing righteousness*. When you ask Him to help you bear these spiritual fruits, *He will hear you*.

Question 4: What reason does Jesus give in verse 17 for saying all of the things in this passage?



Journal Prompts

Praise: Thank the Lord today for making you a branch of His vine, for making you His friend, and revealing His will to you.

Prayer: Pray that you would be drawn closer to the Lord today, that He would help you abide in His love daily.

Promise: Write John 15:9 on an index card and meditate on Christ's love for you throughout the day.

Practical Action: Write down and commit to a specific sacrifice you can make for someone to show them Christ's love and your love.



Day 3: Cultivating Love

Begin today's study by reading Matthew 22:34-40.

Today we are *finally* digging into the actual fruits of the Spirit that Paul lists in Galatians 5. The fruit of the Spirit are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. At first glance the order seems random, but there is a reason the first fruit of the Spirit is love. Love is the most important of the fruits, it is the foundation to everything God has done and will do. Love is the foundation of everything God wants us to be. It only makes sense that before we look at any other fruit, we first look at love. It is because of love that the other fruits will grow. Today we're going to look at what Jesus says about love, the two types of love we find in this passage, and how we can love others.

Question 1: Write the definition of love.

To Love is the Greatest Command

For some context in our passage today, previously, the Sadducees (which were a Jewish priestly sect) had tried to trick Jesus by asking Him a question about death and marriage in heaven (read Matthew 22:23-33 for the full story). They were unsuccessful as Jesus astonished them with His answer. Now, the Pharisees (religious people that followed the traditions of the fathers, they were very knowledgeable) were trying to trick Jesus by asking Him what the greatest commandment in the law was. Jesus doesn't hesitate to answer. First, love God with all of your heart, soul, and mind. Second, love others as you love yourself. Jesus directly references Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, so the Pharisees have no way to dispute Him, and once again Jesus quiets them.

We can see that there are two types of love mentioned in this story. The first type of love is vertical love. This is love coming down from God to us, and love from us returning to God. Jesus says that above anything else, loving God is the greatest command. This *has* to happen before we can love people. The second type of love is horizontal love. This is love from us to other people. This is like the first, Jesus says, it is the second greatest command. We have to love others as much as we love ourselves. We will look at most of the

fruits in a similar way. First we will look at God's example of that fruit (today how He loves us and how we love Him) and then we will look at how we can reflect that fruit to others through the way we live.

Vertical Love

Vertical love, the love that God has for us, and that He commands we return to Him through our actions. Let's talk about why we love God, how we love God, and the result of loving God.

Our first question is why do we love God? It seems like a simple question, but we often forget to love God. We come to him asking for things, we get angry when He doesn't allow things to go our way, we get confused as to why there is so much hatred and tribulation in the world. This clouds our love for Him. The reasons for loving God are very simple, and hopefully this encourages you to remember to not only receive love from God, but to return it as well.

There are three reasons why we love God, though there are many reasons to love Him. The first reason is in 1 John 4:19. It says that we love God because He loved us first. He created us, therefore He loved us first. Just as a mother loves her unborn child before she meets them, so God loves us. The second reason is found in the same verse: God loves us so much that He sacrificed His Son for us,

and Jesus Himself tells us that there is no greater way to show someone you love them than to die for them. This is why we should love God in return! He sacrificed His own Son so that we could have a relationship with Him. The third reason is found in Psalm 116:1. The author of this Psalm says that he loves the Lord because He has heard his voice and pleas for mercy. This is also why we can and should love God! He hears our voice, He hears our prayers. He is a mighty, powerful, Holy God, but His love for us is so grand that He listens to us, sinners.

Okay, we've talked about *why* we should love God, let's talk about what loving God should look like in a Christian's life. Please read Deuteronomy 6:5. God is giving the people of Israel His commands through Moses, and this is one of them. We are to love God with all of our heart, soul, and might. This is the passage Jesus quotes when the Pharisees are trying to trick him. What does it mean to love God with our heart, soul, and might? It means that with everything in us, in everything we do, loving God comes first. It means that the motivation behind our actions should be because we love God. It means that before we love anyone or anything, we love God. This is the greatest commandment in the entire Bible, and it takes a lifetime of prayer, and seeking God to do so.

We must love God with everything in us, but how do we love God with everything in us? A few verses later, in Deuteronomy 7:9, God tells the people of Israel, “Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.” God keeps His covenant with those who love him *and* keep His commandments. Loving God and obedience to Him always go hand in hand. We show God that we love him, not by *saying* it, but through our actions. We *obey* Him, and that is how we love Him. Read 1 John 5:3. John tells us that loving God means we keep His commandments. It is a simple concept, but difficult to carry through. We must come before God on our knees daily and ask Him to help us love Him through obedience.

Question 2: Write the three ways we are to love God in Deuteronomy 6:5 to cement them in your heart.

Question 3: What does John say God’s commandments are *not* in 1 John 5:3?

We've discussed why we should love God, and we've discussed how we can love God, now let's talk about the result of loving God. God is so good and gracious that even though He doesn't *have* to, He rewards us when we love Him. In Romans 8:28, Paul tells us that we are called to be children of God for a purpose. That purpose is to love and glorify God throughout our life. Further, Paul tells us that when we love God and have chosen to walk in step with the Holy Spirit, He works all things together for good. This is a promise we can cling to when we are questioning God and our circumstances. It is a promise we can cling to when our faith and love for God wavers. No matter what trials life brings, we can *know* that God is working it all together for good. No trial or hardship can cause God's purpose for our lives to be thrown off course, we simply have to keep loving and trusting Him. God rewards our love with His goodness.

This is vertical love: the love God has for us and that we return to Him. We love God because of His love for us, because of His sacrifice for us, because He hears us. We love God with all of our heart, soul, and might. We love Him by obeying His word. Our reward is that God is working all things for good because we love Him. I don't know about you, but I'm on board.

Horizontal Love

Let's talk about horizontal love, the love that we have for others. What should our love (or the reflection of God's love) to others look like? Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

This passage of Scripture defines love for us, and tells us exactly what love *is*, and what love is *not*.

Love...

- Is patient
- Is kind
- Rejoices in truth
- Bears all things
- Believes all things
- Hopes all things
- Endures all things
- Is unending

Love is not...

- Envious
- Boastful
- Arrogant
- Rude
- Insistent on its own way

- Not irritable
- Not resentful
- Does not rejoice at wrongdoing

I could discuss each one of these things (that would be a whole study in itself), but Paul puts it plainly and simply. When we consider how we love others, we simply need to look at this passage. Are we patient and kind to people? Do we rejoice with them? Do we bear others burdens, believe them, hope for them, endure hardship with them? This is love!

Are you envious of others? Do you boast about yourself? Are you arrogant and rude to others? Do you insist that things go your way? Are you irritable? Are you resentful? Do you take joy in others' struggles? If so, you need to have a heart to heart with the Lord and ask him to rid yourself of these things so that you can love others. This is not love!

Question 4: What two definitions of love in this passage overlap with the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23?

Question 5: Which of these things do you struggle with when it comes to loving others? Write it down and take it to the Lord in prayer.

Why do We Love Others?

Previously, we talked about why we love God. Let's talk about why we love others! Read Romans 13:8-10. Paul tells us that love is the only thing that we should owe to others. Love is the fulfillment of God's law. If we love God and want to obey Him, we fulfill that by loving those around us. Paul also tells us that all of God's commandments (do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, etc...) can be summed up in the command to love your neighbor as yourself. Love is the root of all, it is how we obey God.

We also love others because God loves us! It is as simple as that. In John 13:34, Jesus tells us that *just* as He loves us, we are to love one another.

Loving others is also a banner of our faith. Loving others is how people see Jesus through us. Our love is our testimony. Loving others is what draws people in to desire Jesus. (John 13:35).

Lastly, we love others because love covers many sins (1 Peter 4:8). People are going to make mistakes, people are going to hurt us,

and we are going to hurt people. Love covers this, it forgives mistakes and hurts. We love others because it covers sins.

Question 6: What does 1 John 4:8 say about those who do not love?

How Do We Love Others?

Some people are just plain hard to love. Sometimes we aren't sure how we can love someone who has hurt us so deeply, or love someone who has made a huge mistake. We are called to love *all*, the easy people and the difficult people to love. The Bible outlines specific ways we can love others.

In Philippians 2:3, we learn that we love others by putting them before ourselves. In the ESV, it says, "...count others as more significant than yourselves." That really stuck with me. How do I love others? By making them more significant than myself. That means serving others, meeting the needs of others before our own, and making sacrifices that aren't easy to make.

We love others through kindness, compassion, and forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32). If you do not treat people with kindness, they will not know that you love them! That could look like

taking a deep breath and speaking softly to the person who accidentally hit your car with their grocery cart. It could also look like “random” acts of kindness, like paying for someone’s coffee or giving a coat to a homeless person. Kindness sets you apart from the world and shows others that there is a deeper love within you, the love of Christ.

We are to love others with compassion. I don’t think that we can be compassionate without first being empathetic. We do not know the reasons behind everyone’s actions, or the history of someone’s life that led them to make certain decisions. We have to be understanding that not every one of us has led the same life. We must be compassionate towards others by putting ourselves in their shoes, and offering grace before judgment.

Lastly, forgiveness. This word is so difficult for us, because it has the connotation of saying things are okay. Forgiveness is not saying actions were right, forgiveness is the choice to look away from mistakes and love anyway. Forgiveness is the choice to let go of hurt and look at those who have hurt us with fresh eyes. If we *truly* love others, we will also choose to forgive them. I think this is the most challenging and rewarding part of love.

How else do we love? In John 13:34, Jesus commands us to love one another even as He has loved us. We are to love others *just like Jesus loves us*. There are no ifs or buts about Jesus' love, He simply does. He loved us in the greatest way possible, by giving up His life for us (John 15:13). Christ may not call you to physically die for someone in order to show them love, but He does call you to make sacrifices. Mothers, without hesitation, sacrifice their bodies, sleep, and other personal needs because they love their children. We are to make sacrifices to show others that we love them. This will look different case by case and moment by moment. Maybe it is sacrificing your time to help someone on the side of the road change a tire, or sacrificing your comfort to have a conversation with a distraught stranger. I do know this, love requires sacrifice.

Loving others is the second greatest command in the entire Bible. It is so important and we can do it multiple ways. We are to love through empathy, compassion, and forgiveness. Moreover, we are to love others like Jesus loves them.

Question 7: Is there someone you need to love with forgiveness today? Write their name and ask the Lord to help you forgive them.



Journal Prompts

Praise: Thank God today for loving you *first*, and dying for your sins.

Prayer: Pray that God would help you love Him with all your heart, soul, and mind. Ask Him to help you love others *more* than yourself.

Promise: Write Romans 8:28 on an index card or piece of paper to carry with you throughout your day. Meditate on the promise that God is working *all* things for good when you love Him.

Practical Action: Write down a specific person to show love to, and exactly how you are going to show them your love this week.



Day 4: Cultivating Joy

We'll open today by reading Romans 14:17.

Paul explains in this verse that the Kingdom of God (Heaven) is not about filling ourselves with food or drink or material things. Instead, it is about peace, righteousness, and *joy in the Holy Spirit*. I love that He clarifies exactly what our joy is in. It will not be found in the mansions He has built for us, or crystal clear streams, or even in the loved ones we long for. Instead, our joy is found in the *Holy Spirit*. Guess what? We already have the Holy Spirit living within us if we have put our faith in Christ! This means that we don't have to wait until we are walking in God's physical Kingdom in heaven, but that we can have joy here on earth because the Holy Spirit is living within us! How sweet to know that if we abide in Christ we can exude joy no matter our circumstances! As I write this it is March 1, 2022. I don't know when you will read this, but the world is currently reeling from a war between Russia and Ukraine. It is scary, unsettling, and heartbreaking. However, with the Holy Spirit living within us, and with

us walking in step with the Holy Spirit, we can still have joy despite tragedy. This is a promise I think we all can cling to. Let's talk about rejoicing, our source of joy, and what we can rejoice in today.

Question 1: Write the definition of joy.

The Command to Rejoice

Several times in Scripture we are commanded to rejoice. In Philippians 4:4, Paul tells us to rejoice in the Lord *always*. Not in just anything, but we are to rejoice *in the Lord*. Again in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Paul tells us to rejoice always. If we try to rejoice in the things of the world we will without a doubt struggle. If we try to rejoice in our own circumstance we will not be joyful for long, because our circumstances are ever changing. Friends come and go, people die, health fluctuates, income fluctuates. The world is devastating, hard, and unhappy. However, we can rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS because He is good. We can rejoice in the Lord always because unlike our circumstances, God never changes (Hebrews 13:8). We are commanded to rejoice!

Question 2: What does Hebrews 13:8 say about Jesus?

The Source of Our Joy

I am personally prone to depression. There has been more than one year of my life where I felt little to no joy at all. In fact, there were many days where I no longer saw the point of living. Depression and anxiety have been a part of my life for many years, and I know that many people struggle with it as well. I'd say the majority of people have experienced an intense bout of depression, anxiety or grief at some point in their life. The sinful world we live in is not prone to be joyful. What got me through those times in my life was locating the true source of joy. I spent a lot of time trying to be happy within myself, within status, within relationships or accomplishments. It wasn't until I found the *true* source of Joy that I began to experience joy in spite of my circumstances. What is that true source of joy?

In Psalm 16:11 we can find the answer to this question. It says that in the presence of God, there is *fullness of joy*. When we are in God's presence, we can be full to the brim with joy! When we follow His path, we are walking in His presence, and we can be joyful. 1 Chronicles 16:27 gives us a glimpse of what it is like in the presence of God. In God's presence there is splendor and majesty. In His place, there is strength and joy! When we walk with God, we are

surrounded by beautiful and joyful things. Doesn't that sound like a place you want to be? Because God is omnipresent, we can experience joy in Him daily, wherever we go, and through whatever we experience.

Another source of joy is the Holy Spirit. He lives within us! In Acts 13 Paul and Barnabas are in Antioch in the synagogues teaching powerful messages and getting great responses. There were some women who began stirring up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and they decided to leave. Instead of being discouraged that their time there was done, in verse 52, it says that they were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings joy even when the people and circumstances around us don't.

As Paul is closing the book of Romans, in Romans 15:13 Paul says that he wants them to be filled with peace and joy in their belief. We can be joyful and peaceful because there is hope when we believe in Jesus. Joy is a gift from God through the Holy Spirit. We have the opportunity and the ability to be joyful. The joy from the Holy Spirit is so much more than any earthly joy. It is joy that goes deeper than the joy we have when we have wealth, or eat good food. The joy that the Holy Spirit gives us is holy joy. When we have holy joy, material things won't matter like they do to the world.

Question 4: Write about a time when you lacked joy. What was your walk with the Lord like? Were you abiding, or wandering?

What Can We Rejoice In?

We know that our source of joy is in the presence of God and His Holy Spirit living within us. There are a few specific things that we can rejoice in that I want to talk about. These things are promises we can go back to when we feel less joyful and don't obviously feel the presence of the Lord. These things are unchanging, and when we can't find joy in our life, we can always go back to these things and rejoice in them, no matter what.

When we are struggling to be joyful, the first thing we can rejoice in is *hope*. Please read Romans 12:12 and Proverbs 10:28.

We are redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ! We have the hope that this world and its devastation and hardship is not our home, we have the hope of heaven. This is a fact that does not change! We have hope that Jesus Christ will return. We are to look to this day! One day Jesus will throw Satan into the bottomless pit and create a serene and peaceful new Heaven for us all to live. THIS IS HOPE!

We can also hope in the Word of God. Jeremiah tells us in

Jeremiah 15:16 that he found God's word, and consumed it, and it gave him joy and great delight. This is an interesting verse. When we *consume* food we absorb it and it becomes a part of our body in nutrients. When we consume God's Word, it becomes a part of us, and when it is a part of us, it gives us joy. We are called by God's name, we are His Children, and we have access to His Holy, Living Word. We can delight in this fact. His Word is where we can be reminded of the hope that we have, and the many promises He gives us. This is why He gave us His word, so that we can rejoice in it! In John 15:11 Jesus tells us that He taught us all of these things (the Gospel so that His joy might be in us. Jesus's words bring us full joy. When you can't rejoice in anything else, find joy in the Word of God.

Next we can rejoice in the person of God. God is unchanging. When the world around us is moving and changing and falling apart, we can trust in the character of God because it is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. David, in Psalm 9:2, says that He will be glad and exult in God. Who is God? Let's take a little peek and just a few of God's characteristics. Read each of these verses and fill in the characteristic of God

- God is _____ (1 Corinthians 10:13)
- God is _____ (1 John 1:5)

- God is _____ (2 Peter 3:9)
- God is _____ (Genesis 1:1)
- God is _____ (James 1:17)
- God is _____ (John 3:16)
- God is _____ (Matthew 6:26)

These are facts about God that do not change, and that we can rejoice in *always*.

We can also take joy in the fact that God cares for our hearts, He cares about our troubles, and He takes the time to console and cheer us. Psalm 94:19 says that when the cares of our hearts are many, His consolations cheer us. In 1 Peter 5:7 we learn that God will carry our burdens because He cares about us. How comforting to know that the God who created rolling ocean waves and towering mountains cares for our tender hearts!

Lastly, we can rejoice in our fellow believers. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20. When the Lord returns, we will take immense joy in that. We will take joy and hope and glory in our fellow believers who came to know Christ before His return. We want as many people as possible to hear and accept the Gospel, this is the purpose for which we were created! We are to rejoice when our fellow believers grow in Christ, have strong faith, and obey Jesus'

command to go into the world and preach the Gospel. We are also to rejoice in the salvation of new believers. Everytime a new person comes to know Christ, we have something to be joyful about.

The Joy of the Lord is Great

In Ecclesiastes 5:20, Solomon (probably the wisest human to live on Earth), tells us that a man who follows God won't really remember much of his life. He won't remember the things he owned or the troubles he had, because God occupied his heart and mind with *joy*. When we abide, or walk daily with the Holy Spirit, we will be so preoccupied by the goodness of God that we won't have time to worry or fret over material things. In order to abide and bear the fruit of joy, we need to focus on the goodness of God. The reason we get sad, lonely, worried, and depressed, is because we have taken our eyes off the Father. If we focus on God's goodness, we can forget our troubles and be full of joy.

Question 5: What is distracting you from the joy of the Lord today?

Scripture commands us to rejoice always, despite our circumstances. This is possible because our source of joy is not of this world. Our source of joy is found in the presence of walking with God. Our source of joy is found through the Holy Spirit living in us and filling us with joy. When we abide in the True Vine, we have four things to rejoice in that are unchanging: hope of Heaven and Christ's return, the Living Word of God, the unchanging character of God, and the salvation and growth of other believers. God is good, and when we focus on *His goodness*, we can bear the fruit of joy in our lives.



Journal Prompts

Praise: Thank God today for making a way for you to abide in His presence and experience fullness of joy, despite changing circumstances.

Prayer: Ask God to take away anything that is distracting you from focusing on His goodness and the joy He wants to give you.

Promise: Write Hebrews 13:8 on an index card and meditate on the promise that Jesus is the same forever.

Practical Action: Write three characteristics of God that especially bring you joy. Pin them up where you will see them daily so you can always be brought back to joy.



Day 5: Cultivating Peace

Peace is a universal desire of all people (well, almost everyone). Everyone wants to feel peaceful, everyone wants to live in peace, everyone wants to create peace. We search for it everywhere: within nature, within relationships, within financial stability, within stable careers, within homeownership, within hobbies and travel. To the unsaved person, peace is evasive. It is grasped for but a moment before it slips away once more. To the saved person, the person who is walking daily with the Holy Spirit, peace is an unchanging gift. Peace flows out from them and reaches out to others. Today, we are going to talk about how, through abiding in the True Vine, we can cultivate peaceful lives, hearts, and minds.

Begin today by reading Philippians 4:6-7.

Question 1: Write the definition of peace.

Turbulence is Inevitable

When you take a voyage across the ocean, from the coast of New York to the coast of England, you cannot expect the entire 3,000 miles of ocean to be calm and peaceful for the entire journey. You have to expect turbulent seas, storms, and massive waves. The same is true of life. You cannot expect your approximate 78 years on earth to be peaceful the entire journey. Becoming a Christian does not exclude any one of us from trials, anxiety, stress, and heartbreak. In fact, in John 16:33 Jesus guarantees trials. He warns us and tells us that we *will* struggle, we will worry, we will experience hardship. These trials and tribulations are necessary, according to James 1:2-4. Take a moment to read this passage. James tells us to count it as joy when we go through trials. Why? Because trials mold us. They test our faith, they make us steadfast and sure, they turn us into the complete person Christ wants us to be. Only trials can mature us into our complete person. 1 Peter 1:6-7 tells us something similar. Our faith is precious to the Lord, and He wants our faith to be pure and without flaws. When we go through a trial and stay faithful to the Lord, we bring Him honor and glory. I don't want you to think that just because you abide in the True Vine that you shouldn't go through trials. Trials are inevitable. Take heart, we aren't finished yet.

Question 2: Think back on a time you went through a trial. Are you now thankful for that trial? Why?

Our Peace is in Jesus

Back to our ocean analogy. I've heard this several times in my life, and it continues to remain the perfect picture of the peace Jesus gives us. When you are on the ocean and a storm arises, the waves beat the ship, you can't see which direction to go, it's pure chaos. But down below the surface, deep within the ocean, it remains calm and peaceful. This is the type of peace Jesus can give to us. While the world around us is chaotic and stressful, deep within our hearts, we can rest easy with unwavering peace.

In John 16:33, Jesus guarantees us trouble. But He also tells us not to worry, because He has already overcome the *world*. He gave us His Word, the Bible, so that we may have peace even though we will also have troubles. We can take heart and grab a hold of that peace because He has overcome the world. Nothing is a surprise to Him. We can rest in the knowledge that the victory is already won.

Not only do we have the Word of God which was given to us so that we could have peace, not only do we have the *promise* that Jesus has overcome the world, we also have HIS peace, which is otherworldly. In John 14:27, Jesus tells us that He gives us a peace that the world does not give us, and because of that we don't have to worry or be afraid. The "peace" that the world offers is *not* true peace. Jesus is our true peace.

Question 3: What are some common places people seek peace, but fail to find it?

How Do We Bear Peace?

In scriptures, we find that in this world, a peaceful life is absolutely not guaranteed. We also learn that *Jesus* is where we can find true, otherworldly peace, and that we don't *have* to be afraid. But, how do we bear peace? How do we grab ahold of the peace that Jesus gives us? I've read a few self help books, a few books about faith, and I was always frustrated that they always told me what I *should* do, and what the end goal is, but they didn't give me practical steps to achieve that, which was the whole reason I read the books in the first place. I want to give you some very practical

steps that will allow you to, day by day, grab onto the peace that Jesus gives us and shed the anxiety.

Step 1: Prayer

Our opening passage today was Philippians 4:6-7. Paul tells us that we aren't supposed to be anxious or worried about *anything*, but instead we are to, by prayer and with thanksgiving, *ask God*. When we do ask God, He gives us peace. In order to grab a hold of God's Peace, you need to get your prayer life in order. You need to get out your prayer journal and PRAY. Ask God for help, for peace, for joy, for faith, for trust. Thank him for *every single thing* that He has given to you. Soon to follow? *UNFATHOMABLE PEACE*.

Step 2: Lay Down Your Burdens

This step goes hand in hand with step one. Go ahead and read 1 Peter 5:7 real quick. Peter tells us to cast all of our burdens on God, because He cares for us! This means that when we pray, we should cast our burdens on Christ. I mean, literally, give Him our burdens and anxieties. If you don't know how to do this, here is a sort of script you can use to help you.

“God, I am so worried about my friend. I can’t control her situation. I wish I could help more, but I can’t. Instead, I give my friend to you. I give you her situation. I give you my worries and fears. Take them from me.”

The next time you start worrying again and coming up with worst case scenarios, pray it again. Verbally give Jesus your worries, out loud. Jesus wants to carry our burdens, He loves us and cares so deeply about us. He does not want us to struggle alone, but He wants us to walk in the yoke with Him (Matthew 11:29-30).

Step 3: Focus on the Good

I think we are too informed as a society, and this has stolen our peace. Peace has even been stolen from Christians as we allow our minds to be soaked through with “being informed.” In Philippians 4:8-9, Paul does not tell us to be informed about the goings on of the world. He tells us to think about whatever is:

- True
- Honorable
- Just
- Pure
- Lovely

- Commendable
- Excellent
- Praise worthy

If you are lacking peace, you need to turn off the TV, turn off the news, delete the social media apps, and begin thinking about all of these things. When you make it a regular practice to think about lovely, pure, true, excellent things, God gives us peace. Paul tells us in Romans 8:6 that when we set our mind on worldly things, the result is death. But when we think of spiritual and holy things (all of which can be found in the Bible) we have life and peace. Start with Scripture. Read it, meditate on it, memorize it.

Step 4: Focus on God

The second that we lose focus and begin looking at the world falling apart around us, we fall apart too. However, if we keep our eyes on Jesus, we can have peace. Read Isaiah 26:3. We must keep our mind on Christ. We must be in the Word of God DAILY, to keep our mind on Him. We must saturate as much of our lives as possible with His truth (the Bible) to keep our minds focused on Him. When we are overwhelmed by devastating headlines, we need to open our Bible and find the promises He gives us, the reasons why we can

trust in His sovereignty. When we are constantly in His Word, we are constantly thinking about Him, and then our trust in Him continues to grow. Trusting in the all powerful, all knowing, completely-in-control Creator of the Universe gives us peace because we know we aren't responsible. This peace is not floundering, it is not flawed, but it is absolutely perfect peace. Read. Your. Bible.

Question 4: Maybe you are struggling to follow one of these steps. Write down which step you struggle with (prayer, releasing control to God, focusing on good things, focusing on God and His word), commit it to the Lord and ask Him to help you become more disciplined.

The Result of Living Peacefully

I love that the Bible always gives us a full picture. The Bible tells us what peace looks like, where we get true peace, and then it also tells us the result of being peaceful. In Matthew 5:9, Jesus tells us that the peacemakers are blessed, and are called the children of God! Read Isaiah 32:17-18. This passage tells us something very important about peace: righteousness and peace go together. When

we live righteous lives, we will have peace. When we have peace, we are capable of living a righteous life through walking with the Holy Spirit. As a reward for living righteously (confessing our sins and believing that Jesus died on the cross and rose again is the first step to doing this), God promises us something great. He promises that we will live in a peaceful, safe, quiet place. Maybe not here on Earth, but one day in heaven, we will live in that place.

Question 5: Where does God say His people will abide in Isaiah 32:17?



Journal Prompts

Praise: Thank God today for providing a peace which surpasses all understanding.

Prayer: Pray today that God would help you with the four steps to living peacefully, and that you would find HIS peace.

Promise: Write John 14:27 on a card and meditate on the peace that *Christ* gives you.

Practical Action: Go back and rewrite which of the four steps to living peacefully that you struggle with. This time, write three practical things you can put into practice this week to help you claim the peace that Jesus gives.



Day 6: Cultivating Patience

Oof. Patience. I've never met a person who didn't struggle with patience in some capacity. For some of us, it's the biggest struggle of our lives. For others it comes like breathing. For most of us, we struggle in some areas of patience and have an easy time being patient in other scenarios. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is living inside of you, you have the capability to be patient. Patience is important, difficult, and *possible*.

Take a moment to read Ephesians 4:1-2. We are urged by Paul to walk in a manner worthy of what God has called us to. How do we walk worthy of God's calling? It doesn't matter what our calling is (teacher, nurse, dental hygienist, stay at home mom, receptionist, writer...), our walk should look the same. We are to walk in humility, gentleness, and *patience*. We do this by loving others continuously and unconditionally. We do this by waiting on the Lord and not taking matters into our own hands. Walking in the manner that God has called us requires patience. Today we are going to look

at the need for patience, how to cultivate patience, and the result of being patient.

Question 1: Write the definition of patience.

The Need for Patience

As children of God, we are new creatures. When we accepted Christ as our Savior, we shed the old man, the one full of sin and unrighteousness, and we put on the newness of Christ. We took on a new identity in Christ. In Colossians 3:12, Paul tells us a bit about this new identity. First, we see that as new creatures, we are chosen. That means God picked us out, and called us His own. Because we are His, we also get to wear His holiness as our garment, and know that we are loved by Him. As Children of God, we need to make sure we have these five things on us as accessories to the garment of righteousness God has given to us. Write them down:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

We will talk a little bit about these other accessories as they are also fruit of the Spirit, but we see that as a chosen one of God, we need to be evidently patient.

In Galatians 6:7-9, we see that patience is needed in the Christian's life because reaping the harvest takes time. Paul tells us that we reap what we sow (v. 7-8). If we are sowing to our own desires, we will reap corruption. If we are sowing to the desires of the Holy Spirit, we will reap eternal life. This takes time, and it is challenging! Doing good and walking in the Spirit is challenging (v. 9). It is easy to do what our flesh wants, but it is hard to do what is right. If we don't give up, we will receive a reward. But we must be patient!

Patience is needed in a Christian's life because God's timeline is different from ours (2 Peter 3:9). Sometimes, we think God is moving too slowly for our taste. But what we think of as slow, God thinks of as perfect timing. He is sovereign. God Himself is patient. He is waiting for us, mankind, to repent and turn to Him. He doesn't want anyone to perish, so He is patiently waiting to send Christ back to us. His timing in *all* aspects of life is different than ours, but it is still good and right.

Lastly, as believers, we need patience because following God takes endurance and patience (Hebrews 10:36). Doing God's will, even the most basic of His will, is no easy task. It takes endurance (the ability to withstand and endure hardship and trial) and to endure, we need patience (the ability to accept delay and trouble calmly). We will only see the fulfillment of all of God's promises when we endure doing His will. As a believer, you need patience.

How Can we be Patient?

We understand the reason behind patience in our Christian lives, but how do we practically cultivate patience? Here are some steps to cultivating patience in your walk with Christ.

Lamentations 3:21-26 is a beautiful passage about waiting on the Lord, take a moment to read it. A practical step to waiting on the Lord is to put your hope in Him. He gives us so many good things to hope for. We are blessed to have hope! Verses 21-23 talk about a few things we can hope for specifically. We can hope in the fact that God's love *never* ceases. There is no action, thought, or feeling that will stop God from loving us. Second, we can hope in the fact that because God's love for us never ceases, neither will His mercies. His mercies will never come to an end. What a sweet promise to hold on

to! Just as the sun rises each day, so does the mercy of the Lord shine down upon us. Lastly, we can hope in the faithfulness of the Lord. We can hope in the fact the Lord is faithful to us, through every situation, *even if we aren't faithful in return.*

In verses 24-26 of Lamentations 3, we see that the Lord is OURS. He belongs to us and we belong to Him. We can hope in Him as our protector and Father. We can trust Him to be good to us in the waiting. While we are working to be patient, He is being good to us. Not just when we get what we ask for, but while we wait for it too. It is a good thing for us to wait for God. It smooths out our rough edges, imprints into our hearts truth about the character of God, and solidifies our trust in Him.

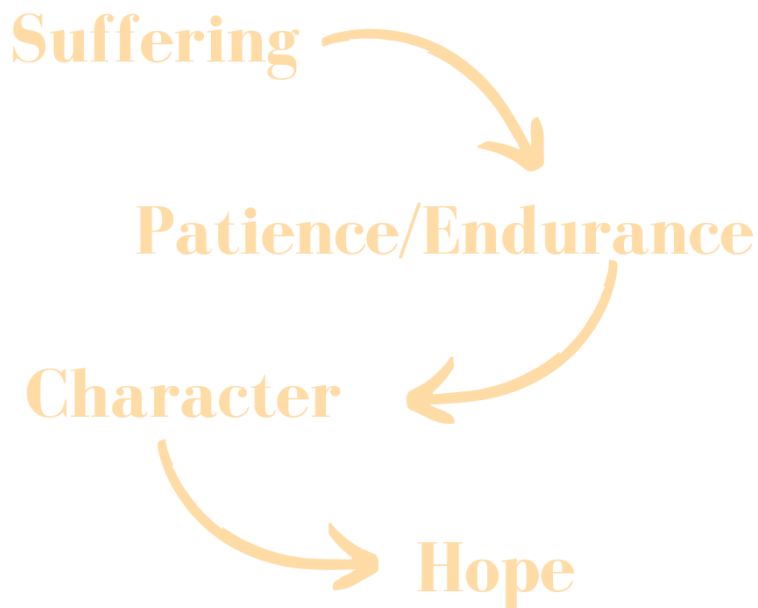
Another way that we can cultivate patience in our Christian walk is by believing in the Lord. Read Psalm 27:13-14. When we are in a season of waiting (whether that be for a child, a job, a spouse...) we must choose to believe that we will see the goodness of God. In a season of waiting when patience becomes particularly hard, we must choose daily to not lose hope but instead believe that God is good and that we will see that goodness. David teaches us that patience (waiting on the Lord) takes two things. The first of these is courage. Waiting often means we have to courageously say no

because we know God has something better coming for us. It also takes strength to wait. It goes against our sin nature to release control to God. It takes strength to not take matters into our own hands (the story of Abraham and Sarah having a baby is an excellent example of why we shouldn't try to take control from God. You can read that story in Genesis 15-16).

Question 2: What two things does Psalm 27:14 say we need while we wait for the Lord?

The last way that we can cultivate patience in our walk is by rejoicing in the suffering. Read James 1:2-3. This is another command that goes against our sin nature. James tells us that when we are suffering, we are to rejoice. Why? Because when our faith is tested through a trial, we grow in perseverance. If we never go through a trial of waiting, we can never learn to be patient and steadfast. When you are in a waiting season, pause and rejoice that God is giving you an opportunity to cultivate patience and steadfastness!

Paul, in Romans 5:3-5, tells us that we can rejoice in our suffering because we know that it will make us better.



When we suffer, we build endurance and patience. When we have endurance, we build good character. When our character is good, we can hope. When we hope in the Lord, He will not disappoint us. God loves us, and He has good things for us, if we only will wait and hope in Him.

Question 3: What comes from patience?

The Result of Patience

Okay, I've decided to cultivate patience. I have decided to embrace hope, to believe in the Lord, and to rejoice when I'm going through trials. What is the end result? More waiting? James 1:12 tells

us exactly what we get when we build endurance and patience.

When we have withstood the test, (the heartbreak, trying to get pregnant, accepting singleness, betrayal), we will receive the crown of life. God promises that when we wait on Him, He will bless us. He will fulfill His promise to us of an eternal life with Him in glory. If that isn't a reason to keep on waiting, I don't know what is!



Journal Prompts

Praise: Thank God for turning your suffering into good and not letting it be in vain.

Prayer: Pray that the Lord would give you patience in whatever waiting season you are in today.

Promise: Write James 1:12 on an index card and meditate on the promise of the crown of life when you withstand trials.

Practical Action: Write down whatever you are waiting on the Lord for (a spouse, a job, a baby, a house, etc...) and commit to praying over it until the Lord fulfills it.



Day 7: Cultivating Kindness

The fifth fruit of the Spirit that Paul teaches us in Galatians chapter 5 is kindness. Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit that I believe every human desires. We all desire to be treated with kindness, we *almost* all desire to be kind people. We all wish there was a little more kindness in the world. Christians should spearhead the kindness movement and Christians should be kind to everyone. Yes, even to those who don't agree with us! For several years, random acts of kindness have been trendy. I do not believe kindness should be random. Instead, kindness should overflow from our spirit-filled heart with the intention and purpose of being the light of Jesus. According to Ephesians 4:32, if you are a believer, you are called to be kind. Not to just be kind so you can post it on social media. You are called to be kind because Jesus is kind. Today we are going to look at our Heavenly Father's kindness to us, our kindness towards others, and the result of kindness.

Question 1: Write the definition of kindness.

God's Kindness to Us

Though the world would have us believe God is not kind (you know, the whole “If God is love, why are there wars and orphans?” question...). However, when we actually look into Scripture, we see that God is truly the picture of kindness. Please read Titus 3:4-5. God's kindness is what saves us from this earth, from hell, from hopelessness. I love the way Paul writes about this to Titus. When the kindness of God showed up, He saved us! It wasn't by our own works, but it was by God's own mercy. It was the kindness of God that renewed us and gave us new life!

If you look around at the world, people who don't yet know God's kindness only see God's severity. In Romans 11:22-23, Paul teaches us that God is both: kind *and* severe. God is a holy God. His holiness cannot and will not tolerate unholiness. Because of this, the unbelieving are cut off from Him. However, in God's kindness, He has made a way! We don't have to stay cut off. When we repent and believe, He grafts us into His family! While God's holiness demands justice, His kindness demands a way for forgiveness. This is the beauty of walking in the Spirit. When you walk in the flesh, you

experience the severity of God's holiness. When you walk in the Spirit, you experience the kindness of His mercy.

God's kindness is not to be taken for granted, dear friend. In Romans 2:4, Paul teaches us that the kindness of God comes with responsibility. We cannot and should not take advantage of the mercy of God. We can't take His kindness and patience for granted. His kindness toward us has a purpose: to lead us to repentance. To repent means to turn completely away from sin. Once we receive His kindness, we cannot continue in sin. It is because of God's kindness that we have been saved. It is because of God's kindness that we are no longer cut off from Him. It is because of God's kindness that we cannot continue in sin.

Question 2: What is the purpose of God's kindness according to Romans 2:4?

Our Kindness Towards Others

Now that we have a picture of what God's kindness toward us looks like, let's learn about why and how we can cultivate kindness towards others as we walk in the Spirit.

Kindness is challenging to each of us in certain areas. I know that I have a hard time being kind to people in my life, even the people I love and *want* to be kind too. Thankfully, I do not have to rely on my own goodness or strength to be kind. I have the powerful, LIVING, Holy Spirit in my soul that makes me capable of kindness beyond my own ability. I am *new*, and the new me is capable. Read Colossians 3:9-12.

In Christ, we have put off our old selves and put on newness. I am not a slave to my flesh any longer! What does this new self look like? Paul tells us in Colossians 3:12.

- Compassion
- Kindness
- Humility
- Meekness
- Patience

These are the qualities I am to have as a believer.

Question 3: Which of these qualities overlap with the Fruit of the Spirit?

As believers we are capable of kindness because we are *free*. In Galatians 5:13, Paul teaches that we are called to freedom, and that freedom is an opportunity to serve each other. We are not free so that we can sin, we are free so that we can *serve*.

Lastly, kindness is a command from Jesus. If we are truly walking in step with the Spirit, we will be in active obedience to Jesus' commands. In Matthew 7:12, Jesus tells us the "Golden Rule," which is to do to others what we wish them to do to us. Kindness includes doing good to those that hate us. We find this command in Luke 6:27 and 35, Jesus commands us to do good to those who hate us! Paul, in Ephesians 4:32 tells us to be kind and forgive one another, even as Jesus has forgiven us. He also tells us in Romans 12:10 that we are to outdo one another in showing honor. All throughout Scripture we are commanded to be kind to *everyone*, not just to those who love us in return. If you want to walk in the step with the Spirit and cultivate the fruit of kindness, you *have* to obey Scripture. That means being kind. Yeah, you read that right. To cultivate kindness, it's as simple as *being kind*.

The Result of Kindness

Our sweet Father of rewards! He does not have to reward us for our obedience, but He does, and for that we ought to praise Him today! Proverbs 21:21 tells us that pursuing kindness is a worthy pursuit. When we pursue kindness and righteousness, we will find life, righteousness, and honor. When we are kind people, God will honor us. The rule of kindness works the same as the rule of reaping what you sow, according to Proverbs 11:24-25. It says that when you give freely, you grow richer. When you are greedy, you will continue to be in need. When you bless others, your life will be enriched, and when you water others, you will also be watered. The result of kindness is life, honor, righteousness, and kindness in return.

Question 4: Write the 3 things Proverbs 21:21 says we find when we pursue kindness.



Journal Prompts

Praise: Thank God for His kindness to you in giving His son as a sacrifice so that you might be saved.

Prayer: Ask the Lord to help you outdo others in showing kindness. Ask Him to help you do good to those who hate you.

Promise: Write Titus 3:4-5 on an index card and meditate on God's promise to save you.

Practical Action: Think of one person that you can show an intentional act of kindness to this week, and follow through.



Day 8: Cultivating Goodness

You will see through today's lesson that goodness and kindness go hand in hand. To be good, you need to be kind, to be kind, you need to be good. Similarly to kindness, we are commanded in scripture to be good and do good. Not as a means to earn our salvation (because we are only saved by grace through faith!), but to be an example of God's goodness and shine *HIS* light. The reason God created and saved us is so that we can do good works, works that God has already prepared for us. He has a plan and purpose for every believer, and that is to do His good will. In Ephesians 2:10 Paul tells us that we are God's workmanship, created to walk in the good works He has prepared for us. Today you might be wondering what your purpose in life is, you may be wondering what God's will for you is, or where you are meant to be. In Psalm 37:3 we are commanded to trust in the Lord, do good, and make faithfulness our friend. I hope today's lesson shows you that God's will for you, no

matter your career, your financial standing, or your marital status, is to do good. Let's dive in.

Question 1: Write the definition of goodness.

The Goodness of God

The first thing we need to know before we can cultivate goodness in our lives is that God is good. I wish we were all together so we could say "God is good, all the time! All the time, God is good!" Psalm 11:7 tells us that God is righteous and He loves righteous things.

Question 2: Read Psalm 86:5. What does this scripture say about God and His love?

God is good and forgiving, His love is steadfast and abounding. If we need to know anything about our Lord right now, it is that He is good. This is a fact. It is not dependent on circumstance, what you believe about Him, or what may happen in this world. God is good. In fact, God is the *only* good thing. In Mark 10:18, Jesus

rebukes the rich young man for calling Him good, and says that God alone is good.

There is evidence of God's goodness everywhere, but specifically on the Cross of Christ. God is good and we see that because He saved us. We read Titus 3:4-5 yesterday, let's read it again. Because of God's goodness, He saved us. His goodness takes on the form of mercy. His goodness looks like the gift of the Holy Spirit cleansing us from all unrighteousness. We are saved, not because of anything we did or said. We are saved because God is good.

Within God's goodness, we see that He is good to His children. James 1:17 reminds us that every good and perfect gift that we have (children, a home, food, friendship, family, church, nature, vacations, grace, mercy, salvation, I could go on and on!) is from God. Every perfect gift we receive is not from any person or any effort, it is from God. In Nahum 1:7 we see that within God's goodness is protection. He is our refuge and stronghold, because He is *good*. In Romans 8:28, Paul tells us that God works everything for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (HIS CHILDREN!). In Lamentations 3:25 we see that God is good to those who wait for Him, and to the soul that seeks after Him. There are

more verses and instances of God's goodness, but if you are a child of God, you should have no doubt about God's goodness to you.

Now, I did say "I should have " no doubt about God's goodness. That doesn't mean you don't doubt. Read Psalm 27:13. We have to believe that we will see God's goodness, it takes faith to see God's goodness. When we are in the depths of a trial (which we will inevitably experience), it is hard to see how God can be good. When you have lost a child, when you face infertility, when you lose your marriage due to unfaithfulness, when you have to foreclose on your home because of finances, it is hard to see how God can be good. When you watch wars unfold across the sea, it is hard to see how God can be good. Friend, you *must believe*. You must believe that God is good, you must believe that He will be good to you on earth and in heaven. Seeing God's goodness sometimes simply just takes faith. If we are in a place where our faith is lacking and we can't see God's goodness, we can ask for *more faith!* (Mark 9:24).

Question 3: Write 1 or 2 ways that God has been good to you recently.

Our Goodness Toward Others

It's easy and joyful to study the goodness of God. When it comes to our own goodness toward others, we kind of want to close the devotional and move on with our day. We cannot accept God's goodness toward us as His children and not also lavish that goodness onto others. That's just not how it works. Being good to people can be hard, exhausting, defeating. 1 Corinthians 15:58 tells us that while it's hard, our goodness isn't in vain. Go ahead and read it. When it comes to our goodness (which is a part of working for the Lord), we must be strong and immovable. It can be hard, but our goodness must not waver or be biased. We are to abound (which means to exist in large amounts) in our goodness and work in the Lord. When we work for the Lord, it is never in vain but is always glorifying Him and furthering His kingdom.

Why is our goodness important, if God's goodness is so great? According to Hebrews 13:16, doing good is pleasing to God.

Question 4: What does Hebrews 13:16 refer to doing good as?

Doing good is pleasing to God because doing good takes sacrifice and selflessness. It is counting others as more important

than ourselves. In Romans 12:21 we see that in our earthly lives, doing good is how we overcome evil. If we are to overcome temptation and show Satan that he no longer has a grip on us as children of God, it is important to do good. Lastly, doing good is a light to others (Matthew 5:16). When we do good, it points others to Christ and is a part of our testimony. Good works glorify God, and that is reason enough to do good.

What Our Goodness Should Look Like

So, we’ve got the basics down. We know God is good (amen!), and we know that it is important for us to be good to others. But how can we practically apply scripture to help us be good people? What can we actually work towards specifically, as being “good” is kind of a general statement? First, let’s take a look at 2 Peter 1:5-8.

Question 5: Read 2 Peter 1:5-8 and write the qualities of an effective and fruitful believer.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

If you want to be “good” you need to work on these 7 qualities. You need to be virtuous (have high moral standards that align with Scripture). You need to be knowledgeable in the things of the Lord, which means you need to be *in* the Scripture daily. You need to practice self-control (which we will learn more about later in this study). You need to stand firm in your faith and not waver when temptations and struggles arise. You need to ask the Spirit to teach you godliness, you need to be loving and affectionate towards others. If you don’t know where to start with goodness, begin praying for these characteristics to grow in your life. These are what makes us effective and fruitful believers. These are *good*.

What else does it take to be a good believer? Galatians 6:10 says that at every opportunity that we have, we need to do good. This one kind of hit me in the gut. Are you sure it says *every* opportunity? Not just the convenient or easy ones? I catch myself feeling callused at a lot of opportunities to do good instead of actually doing good. Let’s work on it together.

Next, go ahead and read Ephesians 4:29, and then read it again. Goodness in the children of God looks like speaking goodness. This is another gut punch for me. Okay Lord, I hear you! This means no gossiping, no degrading people, no cursing, no complaining. *ONLY* speech that lifts up others and shows grace to others. Our words should be full of goodness.

Lastly, goodness in believers looks like the grace of God pouring out of us and into others. Read 2 Corinthians 9:8. We must not forget that it is only by God's grace that we have all that we need and have the ability to do good to others. It is only by the provision of God that we can do good. He pours out His grace upon us, and that is why we can be good. The grace of God should spill down from heaven upon us, and we should then spill it onto others.

Goodness



Grace

The Result of Goodness

Let's close out today by reading 1 Peter 3:13-14.

The result of cultivating goodness in our lives is that we will be too busy to worry about ourselves. If we are zealous for what is good, then nothing can harm us. We will still struggle, go through trials, and experience grief as long as we are on this earth. But if we are so focused on doing good, we won't focus on our hurt or struggle or whatever people may say about us. Even if we suffer, we will be blessed!

Question 6: How are we able to do good according to 2 Corinthians 9:8?



Journal Prompts

Praise: Thank God for His goodness and the mercy that He gives because of His goodness.

Prayer: Today, ask the Lord to help you abound in every good work and do good at every opportunity that He gives you.

Promise: Write James 1:17 on an index card and meditate on God's unchanging goodness throughout your day.

Practical Action: Look for an opportunity to do good today and in the coming days. Instead of avoiding it, embrace. Write down what you did and how it blessed the other person.



Day 9: Cultivating Faithfulness

Today we are talking about the fruit of faithfulness. I was listening to a podcast the other day and they were talking about how you think that faithfulness is something that *you* give to God. In actuality, faithfulness is yet another gift *from* God. Through the Holy Spirit and walking in step with Him, we are able to be faithful to God and with the things that He has given us. Whether He has given us a lot or a little, faithfulness is required of us. Isn't it beautiful that God requires faithfulness from us, and He also makes us capable of faithfulness? I hope that one thing you pick up from this study is that God doesn't call you to do or be something that He doesn't also equip you for. We are equipped to be faithful, and when we are, we will be rewarded. Conversely, when we are not faithful to God we are cast out. This doesn't have to do with just money or possessions, but with every aspect of our lives. Read Matthew 25:14-20 to open today's study. This parable is an example of the faithfulness God

wants from each of us. As always, we are first going to look at God's example of faithfulness to us, then we will look at our faithfulness to God and others.

Question 1: Write the definition of faithfulness.

God's Faithfulness to Us

Before we can learn how to be faithful to others, we need to know in our heart and our mind that our God is faithful to *us* before we are ever faithful to Him. When we grasp this and hold onto this promise, we can be faithful in return. God *is* faithful and always will be. 2 Thessalonians 3:3 says that God is faithful and that He will establish and guard us. Hebrews 10:23 tells us that we can hold onto the promises and hope that we have in Jesus unwaveringly because the One who has promised us those things is *faithful*. Psalm 111:7 tells us that the works of God's hands are *faithful* and just. This is just a glimpse of what the Bible says about God's faithfulness. We can know that God is faithful.

Question 2: Read 2 Thessalonians 3:3, Hebrews 10:23, and Psalm 111:7, and write the verse that speaks to you the most and why.

The Bible is so awesome that it tells us how God is specifically faithful to us! First, let's look at how God is faithful to forgive us. Praise GOD! I don't know about you, but I sin every day, over and over, no matter how hard I try. Yet, God is always there forgiving me over and over and over again, faithfully. Let's read 1 John 1:9. What a beautiful promise: if we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive us. No other stipulation is attached to that promise. There is no, "If you stop sinning today and never sin again, God will forgive you." There is no, "If you say this prayer and light this candle, God will forgive you." There is no, "If you give away 75% of your money and sell your house, God will forgive you." It is as simple as, if you tell God that you've sinned, He will forgive you. Again and again. Read Psalm 32:5. In this verse David talks about confessing his sins to God. When David admitted his sin, God forgave him. He does the same for us.

God is faithful to forgive.

Secondly, we can know that God is faithful to us because He is unchanging. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Hebrews 13:8). An unchanging God means that if He was faithful to us yesterday, He will be faithful to us tomorrow. The influence and fluidity of humanity and the world we live in do not apply to God. In

James 1:17 we learn that God is the source of everything good and perfect. We also learn that God has no variation or changes. This means that if the gifts God gave us yesterday were good and perfect, the gifts He gives us tomorrow will be good and perfect.

God is faithful and unchanging.

Lastly, God is faithful to keep us. What does this mean? Keep means to preserve. If we belong to God, He preserves us. Let's read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. Paul, in this passage tells us that God is the one who sanctifies us, God is the one that keeps us blameless. Paul tells us that the One (God) who has called us to be sanctified and blameless is *faithful*. God will preserve our sanctification. Through the blood of Christ we are blameless, innocent of wrongdoing. God is faithful and we will not one day be considered guilty. Once we have been sanctified, we are *sanctified*. In 1 Corinthians 10:13 we learn that God is faithful to keep us out of temptation. We will still be tempted, but God is faithful and has provided a way for us to escape every temptation.

God is faithful to keep us.

God is faithful. Amen? Amen.

Question 3: What 4 things did we learn about God's faithfulness?

Our Faithfulness to God

Now that we have looked at the ultimate example of faithfulness, and hopefully we have buried this truth deep into our hearts, let's look at why we should be faithful, how we can be faithful, and the result of our faithfulness.

As a believer, my question is always *why?* Why should I be faithful? Let's see what Scripture has to say about why we are to be faithful. First, read 1 Corinthians 4:1-2.

The reason we are to be faithful to the Lord is because we are His servants. We are to steward the things of God, that is, to take care of the things of God. Furthermore, Paul tells us that it is *required* that servants and stewards of the things of God are to be found faithful. Faithfulness is expected if we are to be called His servants. Go ahead and read Colossians 3:17. Paul tells the Collosians that *whatever* they do, whether through what they say or what they do, they should do it in the name of Jesus. This does not use the phrase "faithful" specifically, but if we are to be doing things *for* Jesus, we ought to be faithful. All things that a believer does should be in the name of Jesus, to further His kingdom. That takes faithfulness.

Children of
God



Servants of God

Doing all things
in Jesus' name



Faithfulness

How are we to be faithful to God? It is certainly a challenge, as us humans are easily distracted and quick to give up. Be of good cheer, remember that it is *only through the power of the Holy Spirit* that we bear *any* of this fruit, faithfulness included. Firstly, we can cultivate faithfulness by continually walking in the Spirit. That's the point of this study, to urge each of us to walk in step with the Spirit.

Read Hebrews 3:1-2. The author of Hebrews here tells us to look at Jesus, or in the NIV, fix our thoughts on Jesus. Jesus is the One we call our High Priest (the One who intercedes to God on our

behalf). Jesus was faithful to the One who appointed Him (God), just as Moses was faithful. We can be faithful to God by looking at Jesus. Jesus is our ultimate example, and whenever we are struggling, we can look at Him and learn. The moment our eyes shift from Jesus and to the world, our faith is shaken. If our eyes are steadily on Jesus, the faithful, perfect, unchanging, holy Son of God, our faith can remain firm and steady.

1 Peter 4:19 tells us that whoever suffers according to God's will should entrust their souls to their faithful Creator. When you are struggling with faithfulness, the answer becomes simple, commit yourself to God. This is not a one time prayer and then suddenly you are committed to God for the rest of your life and your faithfulness never wavers again. This is a daily practice of waking up in the morning and saying to the Lord, "I commit my life to you today." When you continually practice committing yourself to God day by day and moment by moment, the Spirit will fill you with a desire and *ability* to be faithful. It is never of your own flesh, it is only of the Spirit, that you can be faithful. Committing to the Lord simply allows you to surrender yourself to Him so that the Spirit can work in you.

Question 4: What 2 things can help us be faithful servants?

The Result of Faithfulness

We've discussed how and why we can and should be faithful, but what is the end result of a lifetime of faithfulness? It is twofold. In Proverbs 28:20 it says that a faithful man will overflow with blessings! Faithfulness to the Lord results in many blessings. We will receive those blessings on earth, such as always having what we need, fruitful and fulfilling relationships, the opportunity to do things we enjoy. We will also enjoy heavenly blessings when we live a lifetime of faithfulness, according to James 1:12. These heavenly blessings are one that we've seen in this study before, and that is the crown of life! We can be faithful servants because we know that life eternally with Christ is waiting for us.

The second reward is found in Matthew 25:21 and Luke 16:10 we see that when we are faithful in whatever we have (no matter how little), the Lord will bless us with more. More responsibility, more opportunity, and more fruitfulness. It doesn't matter if you are the pastor of a church, a CEO, or stay at home mom, God wants you to be faithful with what He's given you. When you prove that you can be faithful with what you have, the Lord will give you more. This is *not* a prosperity Gospel in that if you do x, y, and z, God's going to grant you the house and vacation of your dreams. "More" looks

different to God than to us, and we can trust that His “more” is infinitely better than our “more.”

Question 5: Why will you choose to be faithful to the Lord today?



Journal Prompts

Praise: Praise the Lord for His faithfulness. Thank him for faithfully forgiving and keeping us. Thank Him for being unchanging.

Prayer: Ask the Lord to help you fix your eyes on Him. Ask the Lord to help you entrust all things to Him so that you can be a faithful servant.

Promise: Write 2 Thessalonians 3:3 on a card so that you can meditate on this promise throughout your day.

Practical Action: Pray about one area in your life you struggle to be faithful in (finances, home keeping, work, Bible reading, prayer, etc...) and commit it to the Lord. Ask Him to help you be faithful.



Day 10: Cultivating Gentleness

Let's begin today's study by reading Ephesians 4:1-3.

I'm not sure who you are, what your job is, or where you are at in life. I pray you are a believer, and if you aren't, I pray that by the end of this study you are a believer. I don't know if you feel lost or unsure today, but if you are, I pray this gives you some direction. Whatever your career is, whatever your family looks like, however much money you have, your purpose in life is this: to walk in a manner that is worthy of what God has called you to do. What has He called you to do? Honor and glorify Him in all that you say, do, and think. Love Him with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love others more than yourself. This is your calling, and you are to walk worthy of it. What does this look like? Paul tells us Ephesians 4:2 that this looks like humility, *gentleness*, patience, and love. Why are these things deemed worthy of our calling? These things help us have peaceful unity with each other and with Christ. While this passage mentions humility, patience, and love, we will be focusing on

gentleness today. How can we be gentle? As always, we first look to God, and then ourselves.

Question 1: Write the definition of gentleness.

Question 2: Which fruits of the Spirit overlap with the characteristics listed in Ephesians 4:2?

God's Gentleness to Us

In order for us to be gentle, we must first look to the One who created and defines gentleness. I'm so thankful that when God asks us to do something, He gives Himself as our *perfect* example. God is powerful, mighty, and righteous. He is also gentle. He sent Christ to Earth to be our perfect example of gentleness. In Scripture, we see Jesus called our Shepherd multiple times. We know that shepherds have to be gentle because sheep are skittish, and they aren't very smart either. If a shepherd were to be tough, stern, and yell at his sheep, they would probably run away off of a cliff. Shepherds are gentle, and our Shepherd is also gentle. Read Isaiah 40:11, describing the Savior. I think the picture of a shepherd carrying a young lamb in

his arms, and gently leading the flock is so beautiful. The passage speaks of the gentleness with which God treats His children.

Another example of the gentleness of Christ is in Matthew 19:13-15. Mothers and fathers had brought their children to Jesus so that He could pray for them and bless them. The disciples (still living in the flesh and imperfect) shooed them away, saying Jesus was too busy. However, Jesus (living in the perfection of God in the form of a human) told the children to come to Him, and He laid His hands on them and prayed for them. Jesus was gentle to the children when others were not. A stark contrast to the world we live in today where children are discarded.

We also see Christ's gentleness in the story of Palm Sunday, when Jesus entered Jerusalem. He was the King of the Jews, but He did not come thundering in on horses with a mighty army behind Him. Though in His hand He held power, might, and righteousness, those were not the characteristics that He chose to wield. Instead, He came into the city gently, riding on a donkey (Matthew 21:5). He came into the place He would be beaten, mocked, and killed with peace, calm, and gentleness.

Matthew 11:28-30 shows us more of Jesus' gentle spirit. He asks for the weary, hard working, burden bearing people to come to

Him and rest. Why can we come to Jesus for rest? Because He is gentle and meek. Unlike the harsh world that throws war, death, disagreement, poverty, and struggle at us, Jesus offers us rest. The world is severe and cold, but Jesus is gentle and warm. These are just a few of the examples of the gentleness that Jesus expressed toward His children. If we are to be Christ-like, if we are to walk in the Spirit, we must keep our eyes on Jesus and cultivate gentleness.

Question 3: Which of these examples of Christ's gentleness speaks to you the most? My favorite is the story of Christ blessing and praying over the children.

Our Gentleness to Others

If we are walking in the Spirit, we are being gentle to those around us. If I'm being honest, I've never thought I was a very gentle person. I always *want* to be gentle, but when I get down to the nitty gritty, I'm not gentle. I pray for gentleness every day, and I pray that the Spirit works in me vibrantly to be gentle and puts my flesh to death. This section of today's study is for me as much as it is for you.

How can we be gentle to others when gentleness seems far from who we are as a person? The concept is simple while the

practice is challenging. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. We are *new*. When we accept Christ as our Savior, we become new creatures! We can flee from the old things (greed, love of money, lust, anger, anxiety, etc...) and pursue newness in Christ. The pursuit of newness in Christ looks like chasing after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness (1 Timothy 6:11). We have the ability to be gentle because we are new. To pursue gentleness we must pursue Christ. Read our Bibles, pray, serve the Church, surrender to His will, renew our minds. When you begin pursuing Christ with everything you do, gentleness will flow out of you. That's something I love about how God designed our service to Him. He made it simple: chase after Jesus. He did not say that we must be gentle to 176 people per year and after 20 years we will finally be gentle. All He says is that our heart needs to be after His own, and His Spirit will work *through* us to be gentle to others.

When we are pursuing Christ and gentleness, our gentleness to others should be apparent. It should be a marking characteristic that sticks with those who come into contact with us. Just as someone can look at me and say "Kaydee is wearing black leggings and a t-shirt today!" (who am I kidding, wear that 99% of the time), people should also be able to look at me and say, "Kaydee is so

gentle!” (Colossians 3:12-13). As new creatures we have taken off the tattered coats of sin, and we have put on compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. We are chosen, holy, and beloved. Let’s act like it and treat others the same. Everyone should know that we are gentle (Philippians 4:5). The tricky thing with this is that our sinful flesh tends to let it go to our head. We should not think to ourselves, “Wow everyone thinks I am *so* gentle. I am the *most* gentle person I know. I’m amazing!” Though we are tempted to do so. Instead we must think, “By the power of the Holy Spirit and *only* by the power of the Holy Spirit, I can be gentle today. I pray that everyone I come into contact with today sees the gentle side and not my sinful side.”

Lastly, in regards to our gentleness to others, we must be gentle to *all*. We cannot be selective. Should I say it again? *We must be gentle to all. We cannot be selective.* We are not called to be gentle *only* to those who think like we do, look like we do, act like we do, have the money that we do, serve like we do, sound like we do. Our gentleness is to be known to *everyone*, like Paul says in Philippians 4:5. What exactly does gentleness look like in a practical sense? It seems like an abstract thought, but there are practical ways to help us be gentle to others. Let’s look at a few.

First, gentleness looks like avoiding conflict. This does not mean not speaking up, correcting, or being honest. It means doing so in a loving, *gentle* way so that others may see Christ in you (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Gentleness is also apparent in our speech. If we are to cultivate gentleness in our lives we are to let no evil speech come from our mouths. We are to speak with gentleness and courtesy (Titus 3:2). Lastly, gentleness means withholding judgment from others. We may still speak corrections into our friends' lives in love, but we are not to judge or become a stumbling block to those around us. We are to live in a way that allows others to grow in Christ without hindrance from our actions (Romans 14:13).

These are just a few examples of what gentleness might look like in our life.

Question 4: Is there someone in your life that you struggle to be gentle with? Pause and ask the Lord to help you be gentle to them.

The Result of Gentleness

When we cultivate gentleness, we first look to our Savior as our example. Once we have an understanding of His gentleness, we

can begin to flee the old things and begin pursuing Christ, righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness. When we are in full pursuit of Christ our gentleness will become apparent to others, and we will be able to extend gentleness to all we come in contact with. Walking in the Spirit comes with reward, and so cultivating gentleness will be rewarded. In Matthew 5:5 we see that meekness is rewarded with an inheritance. This does not mean your middle class parents will suddenly become millionaires and leave you with a massive inheritance and mansion. It does however mean that the things of the earth that God has given us to enjoy, we will enjoy. It means that our needs will be met here on earth. It also means that when we die, we will get to live forever peacefully in the Kingdom of God because we are His children (Psalm 37:11).

A second more tangible and earthly reward for cultivating gentleness in our lives is that we will live more peacefully in a practical sense. Proverbs 15:1 says that a soft answer turns away anger but a harsh word stirs it up. When we walk in step with the Spirit and allow Him to work His gentleness in our hearts, we can be soft, loving and kind within our daily conflicts and issues. This results

in those conflicts dissolving more quickly because we aren't stirring up anger.

I'd say that walking in step with the Holy Spirit and abiding in Christ to cultivate gentleness in our lives is #worthit.



Journal Prompts

Praise: Thank the Lord today for being a gentle Shepherd who leads you and carries your burdens.

Prayer: Ask the Lord today to help you flee from the old you and pursue Christ fully so that you may be clothed in gentleness.

Promise: Write Matthew 11:29 on an index card and meditate on God's promise of gentleness and rest throughout your day.

Practical Action: With whom do you struggle to be gentle with? With the Lord's help, go out of your way to show them gentleness in the coming days.



Day 11: Cultivating Self-Control

*“For God gave us not a spirit of fear but of power and love
and self-control.”*

2 Timothy 1:7

The Holy Spirit that is active and living in us is not one of: fear, anxiety, short temper, laziness, disorder, quick to give into sin, messiness. The Holy Spirit in us is one of power, love, and self-control. A person who is out of control, scattered, flustered, anxious, angry, overwhelmed, is not a person who is reflecting the Spirit living in them. God made us to be new creatures, and that means we are self-controlled and self-disciplined. With the power of the Holy Spirit (which we obtain when we walk in step with the Spirit and abide in Christ), God gives us the ability to control our actions and our reactions. Let’s look a little bit at the command, the need, the how, and the result of cultivating the fruit of self-control in our lives.

Question 1: Write the definition of self-control.

The Command to be Self-Controlled

Self-control is not only a desirable attribute in any person, it is a command written in Scripture. Titus 1:7-8 outlines how a servant of the Lord should act, take a moment to read it. First, Paul tells Titus what a servant of the Lord should *not* be. While this passage was written specifically in regards to the pastor of a church, it is still applicable to any servant of the Lord.

A servant of the Lord should not be:

- Arrogant
- Easily angered
- Drunk
- Violent
- Greedy

If you claim to be a servant of the Lord (meaning, you've accepted Christ as your Savior and have openly desired to bring Him glory), you cannot think that you are better or more important than anyone else. You cannot have an explosive temper that is set off by the slightest offense. You cannot be a drunk, or be in the business of self-medicating. You cannot be violent. You cannot think that you

need more, more, more. Each of these negative qualities requires self-control to avoid.

Question 2: Which of these negative qualities do you struggle the most with?

Thankfully, Scripture not only tells us what to avoid, but what to strive for as well. If we are Servants of the Lord, what should we be? The very same scripture (Titus 1:7-8) tells us. We are to be:

- Hospitable
- Above reproach
- Lovers of good
- Self-controlled
- Upright
- Holy
- Disciplined

Walking in step with the Spirit and cultivating a fruitful life looks like the above. We are to welcome strangers and foreigners into our life and serve them. We are to live a life as pure as possible. We are to love all things that are good. We are to be *self-controlled*. We are to be honest and honorable. We are to be set apart for the purpose

and plan of God. We are to work faithfully and be disciplined. It seems almost too much, doesn't it? How can we possibly be all of these things? With the help of the Holy Spirit and abiding in Christ we are capable of all of these things! If we are servants of God, we are to be self-controlled.

Question 3: Which of these positive characteristics comes easily to you? Which of these positive characteristics would you like to work on?

Take a moment to read 1 Timothy 4:7-8. In this passage, we see the command to have nothing to do with silly myths, but rather train ourselves to be godly. We are to work everyday to become Christ-like, and this is something that takes great self-control. Not only do we need self-control when it comes to avoiding falling into sin, we need self-control to implement the Spiritual disciplines in our life (Bible study, prayer, meditation, and fasting). When we are tempted to tell a white lie, we need self-control. When we are feeling lazy and want to sleep instead of getting up and reading our Bible, we need self-control. Training ourselves in godliness takes discipline in the same way that training for a marathon takes discipline. You

can't skip 83% of your runs and expect to do well on race day, You can't skip reading your Bible and praying and expect to act in a godly, Christ-like manner. After all, godliness is of much more value than any physical goal. The reward of becoming godly is far greater than the reward for becoming physically fit, or financially well off.

Question 4: What does godliness hold promise for in 1 Timothy 4:8?

We also see the command to have self control in James 1:19-20. This is regarding anger specifically, but if we can be self-controlled in one area of life we can be self-controlled in all areas. We are commanded by James to be *quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger*. This is just a general consideration of those we interact with! We are to listen well, wait to speak, and hold off on anger. This *all* takes self-control. I know that I often want to jump in and offer my two cents, and boy does my temper flip like a light switch. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we each can be self-controlled in these areas.

Question 5: In James 1:20, what does the anger of man *not* produce?

The Importance of Self-Control

The reason that we see the command to be self-controlled so often in scripture is because it is *important*. We need self-control to navigate this life. Let's talk a bit about *why* self control is so important.

Proverbs 25:28 tells us that the lack of self-control leaves us vulnerable. It says that a man (human) that has no self-control is like a city that has been broken into and left without walls -- *vulnerable*. When we aren't self-controlled we are left exposed to Spiritual attacks. Satan sees where your weakness is and he will no doubt hit you in that spot. Lack of self-control leaves you vulnerable to falling into temptation. If you've struggled with pornography, and you do not cultivate self-control, Satan will cause you to fall into temptation again and again.

We need self-control because we are in a *fight*. Ephesians 6:12 tells us that we are not fighting against flesh and blood, but against dark, spiritual forces of evil. We need to cultivate self-control by walking with the Spirit so that we can fight well, and win.

Question 6: According to Ephesians 6:13, what do we use to fight against these spiritual powers?

Self-control is important because we are under constant attack. 1 Peter 5:8 tells us that Satan literally walks around the earth looking for one of us to devour. We have to be vigilant, clear minded, and disciplined so that we will not be eaten up. No, Satan cannot take us from the hand of God (John 10:28) but he sure can ruin our testimony and lives on Earth if we do not cultivate self-control.

How to Cultivate Self-Control

I don't know about you, but the thought of Satan walking around earth waiting for me to slip up so that he can come in and wreak havoc in my life is a very sobering thought. It makes me desire to master self-control. While I don't have a formula, like, "Do a, b, c, and d, and you will be self-controlled." Walking with the Spirit doesn't work like that), Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 gives us some instruction and encouragement in this area. Go ahead and read it.

First we see that to cultivate self-control, we must be careful to not become prideful. If we think that we have attained self-control, that's the moment we will fall! We must be cautious and humble. We are never too good to fail, we will never *perfect* controlling our desires and emotions. We must always be aware that

Satan is seeking to devour us, and we must beware of our heart posture.

Secondly, we know that temptation is common to *all*. Every person on earth that has ever lived has been tempted in the same ways that we have. Tempted to burst out in anger, tempted to lie, tempted to commit sexual sins, tempted to be prideful, tempted to covet. There is nothing we are tempted to do that is new or unique. When it comes to sin, we are all in this together. Why is this important to remember when it comes to cultivated self-control? Because we can lean on others and know they understand, they can keep us accountable to be self-controlled. We can know that everyone messes up, and that we are forgiven just the same as them. It is common to fail, what is unique is getting up and trying again.

Next, we need to understand that we serve a faithful Father in heaven who knows us more intimately than anyone else (if you need reminding on this go back to day 9). God knows what we can withstand. People often take 1 Corinthians 10:13 *way* out of context and say “God never gives you more than you can handle,” but that is not what this verse means. Paul is teaching us here that God always provides a way to escape temptation. When he says that God will

never tempt us beyond our ability, he means that God always makes it possible for us to withstand temptation. God often gives us more than we can handle so that we must lean and depend on Him to get us through. This includes temptation. However, we never *have* to fall into temptation. With the strength and help of the Holy Spirit, we are capable of self-control and taking the way *out* of temptation instead of the way *into* temptation.

2 Timothy 1:7 also gives us great encouragement in regards to self-control. Take a moment to read this verse.

We can cultivate self-control in our lives, not because of our own dedication, strength, and ability, but because of the Holy Spirit. Maybe it should be called “Spirit-control” rather than self-control. We can cultivate self-control by remembering that the Spirit living within us is powerful, loving, and disciplined.

How do you cultivate self-control? By surrendering and submitting to the power of the Holy Spirit in your life *every single day*. You cannot read this devotional, pray that the Spirit would give you self-control, and be done. No, it is a daily act of surrender. You have to wake up *every morning* and ask the *Spirit* to lead you instead of your flesh. You have to wake up every day and submit to the Holy Spirit living within you, and ask for forgiveness when you try

to take back the wheel. Then, and only then, can you cultivate self-control. It *sounds* like it is something *we* control. However, it is quite the opposite. It is surrendering ourselves to allow the Spirit to control.

Question 7: What areas of your life do you tend to let temptation win? What areas are you actively pursuing self-discipline? Take both of these areas to the Lord in prayer.

The Result of Self Control

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 tells us the result of being self-disciplined. Take a minute to read it.

Paul often parallels the Christian walk with a race. If you are a believer, you are running towards the cross with the goal of honoring God and with the reward of eternity with Him. In this passage Paul tells us that everyone in a race is running for the same prize, but only one person may receive it. He also tells us that they run to receive a perishable wreath. This wreath was made from wild olive leaves from a sacred tree at the temple of Zeus. This wreath would be granted to only one winner (no 2nd or 3rd place). However, once that wreath dried out, it was gone. Our prize as believers

however is imperishable. We gain eternity with Christ. So as believers we must be disciplined. Just as an athlete works out every day and eats a strict diet, we must have self-control. We do it not in vain, but for a great reward.

Question 8: In 1 Corinthians 9:27, what happens when we lack self-control?



Journal Prompts

Praise: Thank the Lord today for giving you His Spirit of power and love to help you be self-disciplined.

Prayer: Ask God to help you have self control, to surrender to the Spirit, to be cautious, and to always take His way out of temptation.

Promise: Write 1 Timothy 4:8 on an index card and meditate on how godliness is promised to be rewarded in this life and the next.

Practical Action: Write a simple prayer of surrender and begin praying it every day. Watch as the Spirit works in your life as you let Him take control.

Example:

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your love, power, grace, and mercy. Thank you for gifting me with your Holy Spirit. Today I surrender to your will and your way I ask that you put my flesh to death today and make your Spirit alive in me. Let me act not in my flesh, but in the Spirit.

Amen.



Day 12: Capable to Cultivate

It is somewhat surreal that we are at the last day of this 12 day devotional study. Many, many days I doubted my ability to follow through and finish this. If we learned anything through this study, it's that we are capable of nothing in our own will and flesh but only through the Holy Spirit are we able to accomplish anything. I pray that this study has been a blessing and encouragement to you as you continually work to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit. Even as I study and write and rewrite, it feels overwhelming to cultivate these 9 fruits of the Spirit in our lives. We've looked at each one in regards to the Father Himself, we've learned practical ways to cultivate the fruits, and we've been reminded each day of the eternal reward that awaits us in Heaven after living a life abiding in Christ. Still, our flesh and Spirit war with one another and it seems impossible. I thought it fitting to close this study on the fruit of the Spirit by reminding you that *we are capable* of living fruitfully and

why we are capable of living fruitfully. Begin our final devotional by reading Galatians 5:24-25.

You are Capable Because You are New

Friend, if you belong to Christ, meaning you have confessed your sins and accepted Him as your Savior, you are *NEW*. Your sin, your old flesh, your human passions and desires, they have all been crucified on the cross with Christ! The person that keeps you from living fruitfully has been put to death.

The person that keeps you from living fruitfully has been put to death.

If you are a believer, you have the living and Holy Spirit within you, and you must *walk* with that Spirit. Walking with the Spirit means giving up your selfishness, your sin, your old person, and living a fruitful and abundant life. You can do all of this because of the cross! Let's look a little deeper into why we are capable of cultivating this fruitful life.

Question 1: What parts of yourself do you wish to leave on the cross as you walk in the Spirit? Be specific.

Long before Paul gets into living a fruitful life in his letter to the Galatians, he teaches them about why they are capable. Read Galatians 5:20.

We are crucified with Christ! When our sin was nailed to the cross in the body of Christ, our sinful spirits died with Him. While Christ resurrected in 3 days, our sinful spirit also resurrected in newness. This is why we get baptized, to symbolize this newness of life. Our sinful spirit was buried, and in its place stands the perfect Son of God. We are dead to sin and the flesh, we are no longer under its hold, it no longer has *any* power over us! Christ lives in us! His power lives in us! We took on a life of faith because God loves us. This life of faith through the power of Christ allows us to walk with the Spirit and cultivate the fruit of the Spirit.

Question 2: Whose power allows us to live fruitfully?

Under Grace

Friend, we are capable of cultivating each fruit of the Spirit because we are no longer under the law but under grace. Praise God! Let's read Romans 6:6-14 and learn about being under grace.

Paul, in verse 6-7, tells us that our old self was crucified with Christ so that our sin comes to mean nothing anymore. When our old self died with Christ on the cross, we were set free from sin.

Question 3: In Romans 6:6, what was our body of sin brought to?

Paul also teaches us that Christ *resurrected*. Christ didn't stay in the grave, and neither did we. We were made into new creatures! When Christ died and rose again, He *conquered* death. His death was once and for all, and no one is ever subject to that death again through Christ. If you are a believer, you have to consider yourself dead to sin and alive in Christ (V. 8-11).

Why is Paul telling us this? Besides simply being a truth of the Gospel that we need to know, we see why in verse 12-14. Because we have died to sin and become alive in Christ, we can no longer allow sin to rule our thoughts, actions, and responses. We can no longer obey the passions of the flesh, whatever that may look like for you. Christ didn't die for nothing! We have to *live* like Christ died for us and that is done by putting sin to death *daily*. We have to live like we've been brought back from the dead because we have. Living like that looks like being a tool of God's righteousness. Living

fruitfully looks like allowing God to work *His* righteousness in *us* to bring about His good and Holy will.

Question 4: Do you struggle with believing sin no longer has power over you?

Question 5: How can you use your life as an instrument of righteousness?

Take just a minute and read Romans 6:14 a couple of times, because it is powerful.

Friend, we are capable of living fruitfully, of dying to our flesh and walking in step with the Spirit. We are capable of allowing God to work His righteousness in us because of this one reason: sin no longer has dominion over us because we are no longer under the law.

We are under grace.

We are capable of living fruitfully because we are under grace.

When bitterness sneaks in our hearts? Grace.

When we struggle to find joy through the pain? Grace.

When anxiety, fear and worry take over our thoughts? Grace.

When we get upset that God still hasn't answered the prayer we've prayed for years? Grace.

When we judge the person who walks into the church because they are different? Grace.

When instead of goodness, we act in greed? Grace.

When we waver and doubt God's promises? Grace.

When we lash out in anger instead of speaking with sweet words? Grace.

When we give into temptation? Grace.

We are capable of living fruitfully not because we have the power within our flesh, not because we are good enough or faithful enough or righteous enough, not because we try hard enough. We are capable of living fruitfully because when we fail, God comes in with overflowing, never ending, abounding grace. He forgives us and allows us to try again. That's why you are capable of cultivating each fruit of the Spirit. Grace.

I don't know who you are, the person that took the time to read this, but know that I've prayed for you. I've prayed that all these words typed out from my own sin filled, but grace covered heart have touched you, taught you, encouraged you, and unfolded

the truth of God's Word to you. Thank you for being here. Thank you for pursuing a life of walking in step with the Spirit. I pray that this teaching sticks with you and grows and changes your heart.

“May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us”

Psalm 67: 1



Journal Prompts

Praise: Thank the Lord today for setting you free from sin and allowing you to live a fruitful life!

Prayer: Ask the Lord to help you remember that you are alive in Him. Ask him to use you as an instrument of righteousness.

Promise: Write Romans 6:14 on an index card and meditate on the truth that you are under grace as you go about your day.

Practical Action: If you haven't yet, commit your life to the Lord today. If you have, commit to the Lord to begin dying to your sin and walking in step with the Spirit today.



Thank you
for reading!