

The Fruit of the Spirit

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FALL 2013 SERMON SERIES COMPANION

For Evaluation & Personal Study Only

Table Of Contents

Introduction	3
Love	7
Joy	13
Peace	19
Patience	29
Kindness	36
Goodness	41
Gentleness	46
Faithfulness	51
Self-Control	56

Introduction:

Galatians 5:16–26 (NIV)

So I say live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desire of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

I am so grateful to live in a time where so many people are open to the person and the power of the Holy Spirit. Arguably, never before since the early days of the church has there been such an emphasis on the work of this third person of the Trinity. We can be filled with the Holy Spirit as were the 120 in Acts chapter 2, as was Paul, and as have been many church fathers throughout the last two millennia. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Christ, and He abides with us, helping us to know our Savior intimately.

Thank God for the treasure we find in chapter 5 of Galatians. All of us struggle in an ongoing battle with our flesh – with our sinful nature. All of us, even the most seasoned and mature Christian, are too often surprised by something horrible we might think, say, or do. Our sinful natures are strong, and easily strengthened by the many influences that bombard us every day: old habits, ungodly images and themes on television or the internet; ungodly music; magazines and shopping centers; restaurants and all-you-can-eat buffets – the list of things that can tempt and feed our sinful nature goes on and on. But the blessing and the relief comes in realizing that first, we cannot do anything at all to make ourselves righteous, and second, God has already provided all we need to live righteous lives.

First, there is nothing I can do to create righteousness within myself. Please do not misunderstand me – we need to live a life in which Christ and his righteousness reign in our hearts. But that is just the point – none of us is or can be righteous in our own strength or by our own design. Only through Jesus can we be made righteous, with His righteousness. We can foster an environment in which He is welcomed and obeyed, and then His righteousness in us will be magnified. We will let ourselves down, but Jesus will never let us down.

Second, God has provided everything we need to live righteous lives. There is little struggle necessary. If we would just learn to surrender our will to Him we would have less strife with our sinful natures. “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” We must walk with Him.

He has made it made it possible, and even easy, to be more like Him. How?

Through His Word which, when studied and meditated upon, will transform our minds. Also, through the vehicle of prayer - we can intimately know God, and the Holy Spirit helps us pray. When we walk in step with the Spirit of Christ, our wills are conformed to His.

When this passage of Galatians is read, the contrast between the personality and fruit of our sinful natures and the personality and fruit of the Holy Spirit is startling. Many of the rotten fruit of the sinful nature still are considered vile and wrong even in our deteriorating post-Modern culture. Hatred, fits of rage, orgies – most people still have some sense of distaste towards these bitter fruit, though the world does its best to blur the lines more and more all the time. But our ultra-tolerant selves might think that there isn't really anything wrong with selfish ambition – how else can we get ahead in the business world? And drunkenness, envy, sexual immorality, impurity, witchcraft, orgies and the like are all welcomed into our living rooms by our own hands each and every day on the television and internet. Not many are appalled or even merely troubled by these things anymore.

But we should be appalled. It says very plainly that those who live like this *will not inherit the Kingdom of God!* Is this the life we want to live, the legacy that we want to leave? No, of course not. We want everyone to experience and understand the society-transforming power of Christ. He came into this world – a place that at the time was just as vile, or worse, than it is today- and turned it on its head. Never before Jesus' first advent had the whole world understood

compassion or seen the fruit of the Spirit in action. We as humans, left to our own desires and devices, produce terrible fruit – fruit that hurts and maims everyone it comes into contact with. The Holy Spirit and those who are walking in step with Him produce fruit that heals and lifts up. Christ and His bride (the church) alone care for the widow and the orphan, for the poor and the downtrodden, for the slave, for the woman, for the child, for the enemy, for the criminal, for the “least of these”.

More than ever, our families, our campuses, our neighbors - the whole world - needs us individually and collectively to abundantly bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”* In the middle of such and angry, violent, unfaithful time, it is imperative that we become a beacon of Christ’s hope. Let us examine the fruit of the Spirit one by one.

- Mary Gautreaux
Huntsville, TX 2013

LOVE by Eli Gautreaux

JOHN 13:35 (NIV)

By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.

If someone asked you to explain Christianity in a sentence, could you do it? What if you were asked to distill the entire thing into just one word? Arguably, there is no better word to choose to describe the essence of Christianity than love. However, as soon as this word is tossed around, many people become confused and are thrown off track by their own misconceptions. Perhaps the greatest problem lies in the fact that almost no one actually knows what the word “love” means. We are hindered by the English language, which has but one word to describe our feelings for our family, and also happens to be the same word with which we might praise any number of things. “I love my wife” and “I love pizza” – it’s no wonder that so many people are confused about love.

It is not an accident that in the listing of the fruit of the Spirit, love comes first. The fruit of the Spirit are descriptions of the nature and character of God – and in this particular passage, a description of God’s character reflected through His people. It is difficult for us to understand from our human perspective, but truly the words – love, joy, peace, etc. – are descriptions of God Himself. God is love. God is joy. God is peace, and so on. We can see that our worldly understanding of love is not even close to the raw power and transformational potential of what love really is.

If we can get past the idea that love is a noun – just a feeling or a thing – and come to understand that love is very much a verb – an action and something that does things - then we are on the right track to understanding this incredibly

powerful word. The right question to ask becomes, “What does love do?” The answer to this question would yield an incredibly long list. For the sake of brevity, we will look at just three.

LOVE CHOOSES

Love is not a feeling and love is not a preference. It is not a whim or a sudden emotion. The best way to explain it from a Christian perspective is as a choice. In fact, love defined is *unselfishly choosing for the highest good of God and His kingdom*. Love is a commitment to always put God and others first, ahead of myself. It is not the opposite of hate, as is so often assumed; rather, it is the opposite of selfishness, which just wants to take in order to please oneself.

God loved the nation of Israel from the outset - this is indisputable. Yet the Old Testament is filled with instances in which Israel’s actions caused God to burn with anger or to pass judgment upon them. In fact, with Israel as well as with the church today, and even with all of us as individuals, our actions more often than not warrant God’s exasperation, not His warm, pleasant feelings. Still, we cannot deny that God loves us. He is wholly committed to the best for us, and choosing to work all things for the good of those who believe.

How can we be sure of this? It cannot be stated any more clearly that it is in **1 JOHN 4:10**: *“This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*

Or just as plainly in **ROMANS 5:8**, *“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

That chapter goes on to say that when we were God's enemies, He reconciled us to Himself. God has chosen to love us, and is with us for the long haul, continually seeing to it that our right choices can yield eternal life and blessing.

It ought to be the same way on the human level. Husbands and wives should choose to honor the pledge they made before God and to each other to "love, honor, and cherish until death do us part." Parents should love their children, choosing to put their kids' highest good above their own selfish ambitions. Christians ought to love the church, striving to always choose for her best interest. Jesus Himself admonished all of us to "love our neighbors as ourselves." We must consistently choose to be unselfish in every relationship that we have.

1 JOHN 4:7-8 (NIV)

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

These verses ought to shake us up a little bit. Are we not failing, as believers in Christ, to love one another? It says plainly that whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. The implications of this verse ought to cause us to pause for reflection. Do we love? Do I love? If not, what does it mean about my relationship with God? It warrants some serious self-evaluation.

When we love others, it shows, and when we don't love, it is painfully obvious as well. The love that we have for one another can be the magnet that attracts others to Jesus through us – this is what Jesus meant when He said the whole world will know we are His disciples when we love one another. Conversely, when we choose not to love one another, then we become selfish and it becomes a repellent. God, in His infinite mercy, has made provision for an area we often lack. When we ask for His help, the Holy Spirit will help us to love. I am

reminded of an instance Corrie Ten Boom related. After spending more than a year in prisons and a concentration camp at the hands of Nazi guards, she later met one of her captors at the end of a church service at which she had spoken. As he extended his hand to her as a fellow believer, she was seized with hatred and unforgiveness – the very things she had just been preaching against. Unable to extend her hand by her own will, she prayed, “Lord, love this man through me.” And, just like that, she felt herself flooded with love and forgiveness for one of God’s children. When we have no love to give, the Lord has an abundance. Through Him we can do all things, and this includes making the choice to love God and others.

LOVE GIVES

We can exercise our love for God and for others in many ways. The Bible tells us if someone is thirsty, give him a drink. If someone is cold, give her your jacket. If someone is hungry, give him something to eat. If someone is alone or in prison, visit and minister to them. We like to say, “*Love finds a need and meets it.*” If I want to love my neighbor, I need to actively seek ways to bless them and meet their needs. Maybe it will involve giving someone a ride to the store, or mowing their grass, or taking out their trash. Perhaps it just means giving of your time in order to really listen to someone and be a friend to him. How much of our time and financial resources are we investing in ourselves, and how much are we investing in others? When Jesus has commanded that we love our neighbor as ourselves, the comparison should not prove so disproportionately in my favor.

True love is selfless, not selfish. When I choose to live a life that reflects the generous and giving nature of God, my actions will reflect this. I will begin to see and treat people as God does. No longer will I place value on people and my

relationships with them based on what I get out of it personally. I will begin to actively seek ways to serve God and others.

Who needs me to give the love of God? Simply look around. We live in a fallen, suffering world. Nations of the world are filled with loathing for one another, persecuting their own people - especially women and children – who need a tangible display of God’s love for His children. How will they know unless we tell them, and how can anyone tell them unless he is sent? (ROMANS 10)

A life that reflects the selfless and giving nature of God also impacts my material resources. No longer can I view my time and money as my own - they are dedicated to the service of God and others. There are many examples that could be given here, but one simple way can show our love for people and their souls is by investing heavily in missionary endeavors all over the world. Not just in any excess change we might have in our pockets on a Sunday morning or a Thursday night, but in sacrificial, planned, significant, and consistent giving. Real love gives.

LOVE TRANSFORMS

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-8 (NIV)

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight

in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

This passage is a beautiful description of the love of God. It has the power to change us from fallen, sinful, selfish creatures into sons and daughters of God. Through God's love, we are being transformed ([ROMANS 12](#)) into the image of Christ ([2 CORINTHIANS 3](#)). We know that whatever God does in us, He also wants to do through us. He is changing us, shaping us, transforming us – and through us He can change and shape and transform our neighbors. I am never just an end for God's blessing and working, I am a channel through which they can flow on to others. Here is an exercise to try sometime. Taking the descriptions from the passage above, take out the word "love" and substitute your own name. Eli is patient, Eli is kind, and so on. Is it true? If not, this is something to strive for each day. As we do, God's love will transform both us and the object of our love. Love changes whatever it touches, it beautifies whatever is touched by it.

The Holy Spirit is who we need to help us. I have little love to give, but He has more than enough. When I ask God to help me, He will. When we walk in step with the Spirit, God's character begins to be developed in our own hearts and lives. And as I begin to live a life of love, His love will increase in my heart. In one of the great paradoxes of life as a follower of Christ, the more love I give, the more love I find that I have left to give.

JOY by Jason Bell

part 1. WHAT IS JOY?

Joy is the result of a life that abides in Christ. It's the natural outflow of spending time with Jesus and it cannot be artificially produced in our own strength. When Paul talks to us about life in the Spirit in Galatians he doesn't say works, deeds or acts of the Spirit. People of the Spirit are definitely people of action, but their acts always follow and result from having found rest in Jesus. Before there is action, there is a ceasing of action; a letting go of all attempts on our part to satisfy the Lord - or even just ourselves - through something that we can do.

The implication of the phrase "fruit of the Spirit" is that the healthy spiritual life can be equated to an orchard or a garden. There is always an element of mystery within a garden as emphasized in the parable of the farmer of **MARK 4:26-28**:

²⁶ And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷ and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. ²⁸ For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head.

How does the scattering of seed in gardening produce a tasty vegetable? There is a Hand beyond our hands at work. In **MARK 4** the farmer is unable to explain the fruit of his labor. There is something beyond what he has done. This is the mystery! It is the same when it comes to the fruit of the Spirit in us. Find the fruit of the Spirit in yourself or a friend and you'll never be able to explain it by natural attributes. In fact, trying to replicate spiritual fruit in your own strength always leads to dead works, whereas abiding in Christ always leads to

fruit that has the seed of perpetuating life within it and reproduces itself again and again.

part 2. BEYOND CIRCUMSTANCES

“No, you have to wait till after dinner.” These are words we have likely all heard from our mothers in regards to spoiling our dinner with some freshly baked cookies. There is actually good reason for this because sugar gives us a buzz that makes us think that we are full when we are not. If we were sent out to do anything requiring physical exertion, we would quickly find out that most desserts provide very little fuel to sustain us. C.S. Lewis says favorable circumstances are much like spiritual sugar.

When things are going our way and we are experiencing some of the God-given comforts of this life, we sometimes fall for an illusion that we are stronger than we think. All we have to do is encounter some opposition for this bubble to burst. Then we may realize that we were actually trusting in God’s blessings and not in God himself. Our dependence was misplaced and we were not actually receiving from the one sufficient source. We are slow to learn this, and are often repeatedly fooled by the momentary sustenance of favorable circumstances.

Recently I found myself whistling as I easily put up a fence between our house and garage. Things went so smoothly that I couldn’t believe it. Then I sat down to complete my taxes, got thoroughly confused by some receipts I had gathered, and my attitude went down the drain. I went from whistling to snapping at my wife in a matter of minutes. Why? Things stopped going my way. For most of us, it only takes us a little bit of opposition or failure to remind us that we are anchored on the wrong things.

Jim Cymbala, pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle, tells the story of challenging his worship team to never step on stage with a bad attitude and, therefore, a bad demeanor that fails to appropriately lead others in worship. That sounds reasonable, but what if one of the team members has had a bad day? He

explains that despite the circumstances of their day, what is supreme in their lives is the presence of Christ. So, we could say that he is not asking them to fake it, but to actually step back into reality and grab ahold of a Person that transcends the experiences of that day.

part 3. WHO, NOT WHAT

“Sir, you need to purchase your plane tickets to fly home. You have to be out of the country within two weeks.” These are the words Steve and Jennifer Cuttino heard from the Czech Republic government after their visas were denied for the fourth time. They had given their lives to making disciples in the Czech and now they were being sent home.

I talked with Steve on the phone shortly after his visa denial and his attitude was great. How is this? That’s what I had to know! I asked, “What did you do when you heard those words?” Steve’s response, “I said, ‘Jesus is alive.’ Try and say that without a smile on your face!” It may sound a bit cliché, but it wasn’t in the slightest. If there’s anything that can bring us perspective, it’s the great truth that Jesus is alive and present in our lives. Steve went on to say, “It’s always *Who* not *what*.” It’s Who your life is centered on (Jesus) not what your circumstances are (getting kicked out of the country).

Another missionary friend of ours, Josh Renfro, also illustrates the importance of anchoring yourself on a person (Jesus) and not your circumstances. Josh and his wife Mayra, in their first term on the field in Chile, found themselves occupied with many responsibilities outside of their plans of pioneering campus ministry. Josh was rarely engaged with students in the context he had imagined and he literally spent months at a time catering to other established ministries - filling in for traveling pastors, teaching Bible College classes and organizing various conferences. These activities left little time for his vision of hands-on discipleship of secular university students. The pinnacle of

this season came when Josh was asked to dress up in a clown costume for a kids program. He initially struggled with it, but then determined to give it his best shot and honor the pastor that asked him to do it. When Josh's first term came to an end, he had established the beginnings of campus ministry and he needed somebody to maintain it while he would be gone on furlough. There was only one man that he could entrust his work to and it was the pastor that asked him to put on the clown costume. The pastor's response? "You've been faithful to do everything I've asked of you. How can I not do this for you?"

It's always *Who* not what! Because Josh made Jesus his integration point, the Lord redeemed his efforts and even made serving as a clown count towards the furthering of university ministry in Chile.

part 4. THE DUTY OF JOY

While joy is the natural outworking of abiding in the Lord's presence, there is another side to consistently walking in the joy of the Lord. Alexander Maclaren calls it the "duty of joy" and says, "Not to be joyful in the Lord is more than a misfortune, it is a fault."

No one has challenged me here more than my friend Rick Stevens: "Don't get me wrong, I have felt grief that made my stomach sink and made me drop to my knees, but not a single day has passed with despair being the primary mark. There's always been an opportunity to set my mind on the Lord and find peace and hope as I've trusted in His character."

This is what I heard when I asked my friend, Rick Stevens, how he was doing after the loss of his 28 year old wife to cancer in September 2011. This has been his testimony to me and to many others. This brings to life the words of the Apostle Paul, "Rejoice, rejoice, again I say rejoice." If you had a chance to talk with Rick, you would find that his experience has involved a very deliberate choice. He chose to not dwell on himself and his loss, but put his faith in the

goodness of God. By faith, I mean he took steps, even before he felt the joy of the Lord. These steps anchored him on the character of God. Then peace and joy came. Maclaren would call this fulfilling the duty of joy. Yes, joy is the natural outworking of abiding in Christ, but it does take a deliberate effort to place yourself in the Lord's arms.

David understood this when he said, "Why are you downcast oh my soul?" He knew the cultivation or practice of full-dependence. We find him actually talking to himself that he might set his mind on the Lord and receive from Him instead of despairing over his circumstances.

How does a word like duty fit into the earlier mention of a garden with mystery that puts so much emphasis on the Lord's work and not our own? Fulfilling a duty in this sense doesn't mean bearing fruit in our own strength. It means willfully placing ourselves in the hands of the one through whom we can bear fruit. In a fallen world where we are well trained and entrenched in selfishness it takes discipline to abide in Christ, living out the deliverance He has provided for us.

Nehemiah's words, "The joy of the Lord is our strength", as He led God's people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, bring an integration and show a sense of the duty of joy while also implying the principle of abiding. This was a call to those he led to stir themselves and deliberately realize who God is and what His record had been with them.

In essence, he said we go out in strength to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem because we have found joy in remembering that we serve the same God who crumbled the walls of Jericho and split the Red Sea wide open!

part 5. THE JOY OF THE LORD IS OUR STRENGTH

The Christian works from, not to, Christ. We don't go out to find approval; we go out because we've found approval in and through Christ.

In *Pilgrim's Progress*, the famous allegory by John Bunyan, one of the characters, Giant Despair, was met on the path of doubt. Doubt is not a lack of faith, it is a misplaced faith. Faith in the wrong one inevitably leads to the opposite of joy - despair. This is not our story. Having met Jesus we can go out in joy and therefore in strength.

In a recent interview, Michael Jordan summed up his brief stint as a baseball player as an attempt to find satisfaction that basketball could no longer give him. He lived, trained and chased his career goals in basketball with a relentless pursuit, but after he reached the top he had to try something else. In contrast, the Christian, having met Jesus, lives from Him. They live out of what they have and not what they don't have.

This was Nehemiah's understanding when he said, "The joy of the Lord is our strength." He knew that the temple would not be built if the people were working so that they would be satisfied. They had to be satisfied and convinced that the Lord has provided and is providing. This realization would enable them to go out in strength, despite strong opposition from the surrounding nations and difficult circumstances.

This can and should be our story! We have found the Living water and the Bread of Life. We have found what we were looking for and are satisfied and can say with David, "Taste and see that the Lord is good!" Joy is the work of Jesus in us! It is beautiful and mysterious in that our human efforts cannot produce it. It is not rooted in circumstance, therefore we may have it in any circumstance. And we can operate in strength, which is fortified by joy, against any opposition in this world. May we be people that go out because we have found all that we could have ever dreamed of and are compelled to share it.

PEACE by Faith Robinson

Peace is truly one of the buzzwords of our generation and moment in history - a globally trendy banner waved by people from all backgrounds. A quick Google search for the word peace will return quite the diversified list of peace movements and initiatives. From the realms of popular culture, political influence, religious circles, educational institutions, humanitarian pursuits, environmental and social activists, we can hear the cries promoting peace. Great efforts are being undertaken in the name of peace; yet somehow in our “advanced” stage of humanity, with all of its modernity and with knowledge surpassing every generation before, peace still eludes us. In fact, I don’t even know if we can all agree on a common definition of peace.

As followers of Jesus, how important it is for us in this cultural climate to have an accurate, Biblically grounded understanding of peace. The peace the Bible speaks of from Genesis to Revelation is not a flaky, hollow notion of harmony and good will. It is not inner tranquility or calm that comes from positive thinking or escaping reality.

JOHN 14:27

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

The world is not able to give us what Jesus gives us. The world offers us false hope, disappointment, and a distorted reality. In the Scriptures, this peace that Jesus promised us stands in stark contrast: His peace is a supernatural, life-giving truth anchored in the very person and character of God. When we walk

in this kind of peace, it overflows out of us, spreading life and hope wherever we go.

So how do we get there?

Paul tells us in Galatians 5 that peace is part of the fruit we bear when we walk in step with the Spirit. It grows over time in a continual walk with the Lord - not in a vacuum of religiosity, but through the pressure cooker of life's daily demands and trials. Let's take a few steps back and look at the Bible's whole picture of peace, and ask the Lord to help us understand how we can bear this kind of peace as we walk with in step with Him.

THE PROMISE OF PEACE: God's Law

Even a brief, simple study of the word peace in the Old Testament reveals some astounding insight into the nature of true peace. This Hebrew word *shalom*, often translated into peace, carries a world of depth and meaning. Strong's Concordance defines *shalom* as: completeness, safety, soundness, welfare, health, prosperity, peace, quiet, tranquility, contentment, and friendship with human relationships as well as in covenant relationship with God. Any time *shalom* was mentioned in the Old Testament, all of these meanings were contained in this one word!

The first glimpse of *shalom* as a promise from God is found in Leviticus 26 as part of the Law that was given to Moses and the children of Israel. Remember, God's laws in the Old Testament were given as an introduction for people to know him. He laid down guidelines with Moses and the children of Israel as first steps for them to know who He was. As part of His guidelines, God promised *shalom* to anyone that would follow His decrees and commands. If they

followed his instructions, his *shalom* would protect them. They would have safety, soundness, prosperity, contentment and friendship within his Law. Outside of his laws, they could not be protected by his *shalom*.

As men and women in the Old Testament began to follow the Lord, this deep sense of *shalom* was longed for and sought after, both individually and corporately. It became the blessing pronounced over family, friendships, even a way of showing hospitality to strangers; it also was even withheld from those who were seen as enemies. Over and over again throughout the Old Testament, the word *shalom* was used to extend greeting, God's blessing, and wishes of wellbeing, safety, health and prosperity to one another. Repeatedly, His peace was connected with uprightness and following the ways of God.

God's *shalom* was and continues to be a protection in the lives of his children. When we follow his ways and set our eyes on him, avoiding the places he asks us to steer clear of, his peace protects us. His Word echoes this promise of peace in light of following His laws.

PSALM 119:65

Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.

PROVERBS 3:1-2

My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity.

ISAIAH 32:17

The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.

ISAIAH 48:22, 57:21

“There is no peace,” says the Lord, “for the wicked.”

THE SOURCE OF PEACE: Jehovah Shalom

As we move forward in history, we see God further steps beyond his Laws to reveal himself to his people. When we come to Judges 6, we see Gideon, who was confronted by the Lord Himself, and called to lead the Israelites into victory from the hands of the oppressive Midianites. The entire exchange between Gideon and the Lord leaves him in fear and uncertainty. Gideon reminds God that he is the least in his family, and his family is the weakest tribe in the nation. How can he be expected to lead his people to victory and freedom? In response to Gideon’s questioning and fearful heart, God’s word is “Shalom!” “Peace!” God revealed himself as Peace to Gideon, extending this all-encompassing *shalom* to him.

Something changes inside Gideon when God meets him with His great peace. In worship, Gideon builds an altar to the Lord, calling it “Jehovah Shalom,” which means “The Lord is Peace.” The very presence of God brought *shalom* – security, safety, health, wellbeing, prosperity, friendship, and peace – to Gideon’s circumstances and concerns. With God’s presence and promise of peace, Gideon goes on to lead the Israelites to victory and freedom from the Midianites.

God alone is the source of peace. It is his presence that produces peace within the hearts of his children. Like Gideon, we often doubtfully point back to where we’ve come from – our past, our weaknesses, and our failures. Or we fearfully point to what lies ahead of us – the insurmountable challenges, the uncertainties, the questions. But God’s word to us today is still the same as it was for Gideon:

“Shalom!” “Peace!” He still offers his presence as our peace. He gives us Himself as our anchor and our guide. In him we have protection and security and everything we need to push past what is behind us and to face what lies ahead. When we really taste his presence like Gideon did, we too will be stilled and worship him as Jehovah Shalom – God our Peace. This is the only natural overflow of his Presence. We can remind ourselves of this truth by standing on His Word when we are faced with doubt, fear, or anxious thoughts about our past or future.

PSALM 4:8

I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

PSALM 29:11

The Lord gives strength to his people, the Lord blesses his people with peace.

ISAIAH 26:3

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

ISAIAH 27:5

Lord, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

THE MESSAGE OF PEACE: Friendship with God

When we again widen the lens, we see that peace is not simply a personal byproduct of individually following God’s law and being in God’s presence. This

is only part of the picture. There is also a beautiful overarching message of peace that is proclaimed all throughout the Bible. The Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament look toward it in hope and longing. The New Testament Church rejoices in the fulfillment of it. And right in the middle of history stands Jesus, presenting himself as the way to peace between God and man. Because he made a way, we have been given the greatest gift – knowing God and being with him for eternity.

The single reason we can fasten ourselves to God's promises of peace, and know him as Jehovah Shalom, is because He made a way for us to have peace with him. We were alienated from God, lost in our ignorance and sin. We could have no part with God, until this message of peace came alive in our souls. But once it took a hold of us, we were given a seat at His table, a place forever in His family. Jesus, our Prince of Peace, gave himself to bring us friendship with God! This is the message of peace. We, too, now joyfully share in the message of peace by extending it to anyone who would hear us.

ISAIAH 9:6-7a

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end...

ISAIAH 52:7

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

LUKE 2:14

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

ACTS 10:36

You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of Peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all.

ROMANS 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

EPHESIANS 2:17

He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

EPHESIANS 6:15

[Stand] with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel [good news] of peace.

THE INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE: You and I!

This great message of peace has brought us into friendship with Jehovah Shalom – the God of Peace. As His friends, we have the amazing privilege of knowing His character and His ways. As we continue walking with him, His peace protects and guides us. And now, the responsibility is ours to be agents of His peace. We carry in our words and in every part of our lives the message of peace to the world.

This sounds beautiful doesn't it? And it truly is a beautiful thing; yet, this is also exactly the place where we are always tested – our day-to-day lives. Remember again our earlier definition of Biblical *shalom*: completeness, safety, soundness, welfare, health, prosperity, peace, quiet, tranquility, contentment, and

friendship. This is the kind of peace that is to overflow in our conversations, our interactions, our homes and families. Our lives are to be marked by the presence of God bringing this kind of peace with us in every moment.

Let's take a moment to think about this. What do people see when they look at us? Do our lives paint a picture of trusting God? Or are we perpetually anxious and worried about the future? Do we have quarreling spirits? Do we bring stress or peace with into conversations and relationships? Are we argumentative, always wanting the last word? Or are we quick to lay down our opinions and hold our tongue? Are we quick to forgive? Or do we hold grudges and withhold our peace and blessing? Do we spread gossip and strife?

We are called to live in peace with ourselves, with the family of God, and to be peacemakers everywhere we go. Only when our lives are ruled by God's peace do we become true peacemakers, whom Jesus calls children of God.

It can seem overwhelming when we look at our flawed personalities, that we are called to produce peace in our lives that pushes others to the Lord. But remember, Jesus is our peace. He really is with us. He enables us. He lives and moves in and through us. When we are bridled by His love and His character, then His Spirit produces peace in us, and we become instruments of His peace.

PSALM 34:14

Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

MATTHEW 5:9

Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.

ROMANS 14:19

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:11

...Aim for perfection listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

EPHESIANS 4:3

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

COLOSSAINS 3:15

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Bearing Peace in Real Life

The more we examine the Scriptures, the ever-increasingly beautiful picture of the Lord we see. These truths that are revealed and illuminated to us by the Word of God and the Spirit of God prove to be so much more than a mere intellectual understanding or moral checklist. These truths are to grab hold of us in such a way that our lives depict a magnetic resemblance to the Lord.

When we look at the whole picture of peace from the Scriptures, it's easy to see that the world simply cannot produce in us what only the Holy Spirit can. God is the initiator and source of true peace. The depth of peace he offers in relationship with him is a far cry from anything outside of Him. When we are filled with His Spirit, his peace flows into every corner and crevice of our lives, transforming us. Our conversations, our relationships, our work, our ethic, our

efforts, our outlook – they all become supernaturally changed by his character, and we bear His fruit which is marked by peace.

It doesn't happen overnight, but through a lifelong fellowship with Jesus. I'm grateful to have been walking with him for many years now. I can look back to five or ten years ago and say that I never knew Him like I know Him today. I can point to places in my life where He has put his finger of conviction and discipline, asking me to choose to be like him than to be controlled by my own will. When I wrestled with big life altering decisions, it was the peace found in tasting His presence and knowing his Word that guided my steps. I'm humbled as I see so plainly that He has led me with his supernatural peace. Not because life has been always worry free and happy. There are many questions I wrestle with and lay at his feet daily. But Jesus my peace has been my protection and my hope.

We are all still on the journey, and He isn't finished yet. But let's keep walking in step with the Spirit so our lives can bear His fruit. Let's keep laying our lives at the cross where His peace can be part of what he produces in us.

PATIENCE by Josh Renfro

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-33

“Come back in ten days, and we’ll see how it goes then.” - These were not the words that I was expecting to hear on August 28, 2012 when we went in to find out the gender of our second child. A shotgun blast of questions scattered through my mind, but the emotional heaviness left me unable to respond to my wife’s doctor, and it took every ounce of strength that we had to make it out of the office before losing it in the waiting room. No pain compares to the pain that is out of your control, that you have no say in, no way to numb the hurting, and no solution for but to wait; but so often this is how the process of patience begins.

Hydrocephalus is a condition in which the flow of cerebral spinal fluid is obstructed, provoking inflammation within the brain, causing minor to severe damage, or even death. It was a diagnosis that sat like a rain cloud over the wonderful news that we would have a boy. It is a very unfortunate diagnosis with quite a dreary outlook, especially since it was severe enough to be detected at such an early stage in the pregnancy. This condition was not new to me - my brother had been born with and died from complications of the same condition. Still, you could not have surprised me more if you had blindsided me with an eighteen-wheeler truck. On top of that, they told me I had to wait ten days to see how things go. Ten days! Are you kidding?

Little did we know at that moment, that for the next five months we would be living our lives in ten days stints, each time trying to process the bad news while trying to cling to what little good news we received after each sonogram or MRI they did to monitor our son’s progress. Ten days of waiting was an eternity

that soon became the norm. Ten days became the grindstone upon which God produced the fruit of patience in our lives.

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

In an almost comical fashion to the modern reader, older English versions of the Bible referred to this fruit of the Spirit as “longsuffering”. This is actually not a bad description of patience - the end result of long periods of suffering. Some have defined patience as one’s level of endurance through difficulties without complaint, irritation, or other negative behavior. Perhaps, for the Christian, patience is the level of endurance we possess through difficulties while still trusting God and maintaining a solid testimony.

Since our testimony is defined as representing God’s character and truth in an authentic way, then we could succinctly define patience like this: making the Lord look good even when it’s tough. We need patience, but most of us lack a great deal of it. Ironically, trials are the very things that help to produce patience, but most of us would avoid them if we could. Not that we should seek out difficult circumstances, but we must recognize that trials will come in life, regardless of who we are. However, it is our decision to wait upon God in the midst of them that determines whether or not it will produce the fruit of patience. Patience comes from waiting upon the Lord.

The Prophet Jeremiah, author of the book of Jeremiah and Lamentations, knew very well how this worked. He was known as the “weeping prophet”, not just because he preached about the coming destruction of his people for their sins, but also because he preached about the future restoration, which, sadly, he would never see. He wrote Lamentations in the midst of seeing his people being carried away as captives and his homeland burned to the ground. Where was the restoration that God had promised in the book of Jeremiah? Jeremiah had put his

hope in the Lord, and he could patiently wait upon the promise that he himself would never see, because God was his focal point. Jeremiah's eyes were set upon God's "great love", so he was not "consumed" with grief. Rather, at that moment, patience was being wrought in his life. God's faithfulness is so great. We can rest assured that even when our patience is tried and found wanting, at that very moment God is working to produce fruit, even enough fruit to last a period of ten days at a time.

"It doesn't look any better, so we will just have to wait and see." I was could feel my anger rising with each word that the doctor uttered. Our ten-day boot camp in patience had now come to an end, and having mustered all the faith possible, I fully expected a miracle. The whole scene had played out in my head for ten straight days: the doctor would begin the sonogram and then suddenly his usual stoic face would reflect puzzlement, followed by an exclamation of amazement at the impossible miracle that just took place - but that didn't happen. In the midst of a barrage of medical terms we heard phrases such as "rapidly developing condition" and "brain surgery upon birth", a far cry from the words "miracle" and "congratulations". Sometimes after you have waited, you don't get the answer you want. Sometimes after you have waited, you simply have to wait some more.

LAMENTATIONS 3:25-27

"The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for man to bear the yoke while he is young."

God is all-powerful and easily could have healed my son before that second appointment. So why didn't he? I don't wish to delve into the issue of God's permission of suffering in the world; this is, after all, a story about patience. However, it would be of great benefit to realize that we are limited in our scope of knowledge, and just because we may not perceive any justifiable reason for God's allowance of suffering does not mean that there is none. When coupled with the

idea that the chief end of man is not our personal happiness, but the glory of God, then we begin to see that perhaps there is a greater good in the mind of God that lies at the root of our waiting. Job didn't receive an answer about his circumstances, but he didn't curse God and die either; he waited patiently.

The scripture above says that the Lord is good to those who hope in him, to those who seek him. How often do we seek the benefit of the Lord before we seek the Lord himself? The working of patience in our lives mercifully prevents us from getting what we think we want, and graciously gives us what we really need. By learning to put our hope in the Lord only, we draw closer to Him. I would not be so fatalistic, or even egocentric, as to think that the primary reason that God did not heal my son was to make me a more patient person. God is not the author of evil or sin. Sometimes bad things just happen in a fallen world. However, God is the author of redemptive purposes in the midst of chaos.

Even when we have to wait for another ten days, when we wait upon the Lord we have the joy of knowing that God is graciously producing the fruit of the Spirit in our chaotic lives. "It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord", does not mean that the experience is "good" in the sense that it is agreeable or fun, but it is "good" because it expediently produces the fruit of the spirit in our lives. Above all else, that day I wanted a miracle. But above all else, God wants our hearts, so sometimes we have to wait.

"Where are you Lord?" Men want to fix everything. That is why we suffer from a lack of patience the most, because when we can't fix a problem, we lose it. Especially when the problem involves your wife and babies, then it gets personal. I was exhausted, but even more than that I was angry. I was angry because this beautiful baby boy was right there, we could even feel him kick, but I couldn't do anything to help him. We had just returned home from another sonogram and things had just gotten worse, because a second nightmare just entered the picture. As a matter of fact, the hydrocephalus was now just a secondary condition that could hopefully be fixed upon birth, but this new condition was "incompatible with life". The doctor likened the first condition to

fixing a important piece of your car's motor that had broken, but now, the new condition was as if they had never put in that piece of the motor, and now there was no way to put it in or fix it. It was not a repair issue with his brain, it was a formation issue, and you can't fix that.

I held my wife in my arms as she wept like I had never seen before, and she cried out that God would give her the sweet little boy for which she had prayed. "Where are you Lord? Fix this! Make it go away; all I want is my son to make it." That was my silent prayer to God as we wept together on the couch, silent because I had no more strength to utter a prayer aloud. Patience is the level of endurance we possess while still being able to trust God in our own strength. I couldn't fix my son's brain, and I had no more patience left, and no more hope with which to wait upon the Lord.

LAMENTATIONS 3:28-30

"Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust - there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to the one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace."

It is very easy to ask why, but much harder to trust. How does Jeremiah trust God enough to say that there still "may yet be hope"? We cannot see how God can be so longsuffering when we ourselves have no patience left. I am convinced that our tears break his heart as well, and because of that God is also patient to endure His and our suffering together. The difference is that he knows everything that can be known, and is sovereign to act at the right moment. In other words, God can wait and endure with great patience because he knows that the end result he is producing will be so much greater than our petition.

Second Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." The context of this verse is that many Christians were beginning to doubt the second coming of Christ because it was not happening right away. Jesus had promised to come back and usher in his

eternal reign after the Gospel had been preached in the whole world. But the people to whom Peter was writing had gone through much persecution for their faith, and they were beginning to doubt. Peter explains that God is patient and able to wait, because He is not willing to let anymore souls perish without the message of Christ.

God wants all men to come to repentance and give their lives to Christ, but God doesn't just think in terms of individual people; he thinks also of nations. Though there are Christians throughout the whole world, there are entire nations and people-groups that, if Christ were to come now, would perish without access to the Gospel. God is patient to wait for us to do His work of sharing Christ in the whole world, so that every people group on earth may be reconciled to the living God. God's patience is rooted in His wisdom and sovereignty, in the knowledge that if he waits just a little longer, something so much greater will come to pass for His glory and for our highest good. Our patience is the fruit of His character being infused into our lives, so that we may be able to endure "longsuffering" with faith and hope that God is simultaneously working for a greater goal.

"So how is your son?" Two days after John Mark was born, I walked down the hall towards the room where my wife and son were staying. The proud father in the room next to us stopped me to ask if my son was doing better. Since I had never met this man before in my life, I asked him how he knew something was wrong. "I saw you that day at the doctor's office, while my wife and I were still waiting for our appointment. I saw you and your wife come out, both of you were crying. I knew something was terribly wrong that day, and I have never forgotten your faces." I don't know who was more amazed at the miracle I began to tell this man, him or me. I could hardly believe it myself, as I, for the first time, began to tell the story of how my son was healed.

It wasn't instantaneous, but after crying out to God that one night, each report got a little better. Instead of hearing "incompatible with life" and "brace yourself for the worst" we began to hear the doctor say things like "wow, this is

great news” and “I love to be wrong in these types of cases”. I told this new father the story of a God who heals, who gave life to a child that had very little chance, and who gave to a desperate mother her sweet little boy that she had prayed for. We hugged and congratulated one another for our new children, and I walked away, fully aware that this would not be the first time that God used my son’s story to share the Gospel with somebody.

LAMENTATIONS 3:31-33

“For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.”

Sometimes miracles or answered prayers don’t always follow “amen”, but rather they come slow and progressive. During these times the hardest thing to do is forget what our “best idea” about the situation is, and try to envision why God would carry us through these times for longer than we would like. For one, it would be safe to say that thousands of people were united in prayer for John Mark. That in itself is a beautiful thing - to see the body of Christ joined together for a common purpose. Perhaps not as many people would have been part of the miracle if the healing had been sooner. Also, before leaving the hospital we shared John Mark’s testimony with people we didn’t even know, and since then everybody else we meet gets to hear it. That is a lot of seed being planted.

Undoubtedly, the most unpleasant moments were those ten-day stints of uncertainty and fear. The process of patience is not pretty or polished. It is learning to cling to the One who is compassionate to those who suffer and whose unfailing love fills their broken spirits as they wait upon Him. What a privilege we have, that God shapes us in to the very image of his Son, producing a patience and character that only the Spirit could bring to fruition. But this process takes time. May God help us to wait upon Him in the midst of trials, and grant us the patience to trust His purpose in the things we do not yet understand.

KINDNESS by Amber Deirshaw

I want to be kind. Seriously, I do. I wrestle with it weekly, sometimes daily. Over and over again in my head I chant, “I want to be kind...I want to be kind...I want to be kind.” Foolishly, I’ve believed if I just thought about it enough, repeated that mantra in my head enough, kindness would materialize and just begin to naturally pour forth from my very being. Naturally. Quick opinions, sharp quips, and biting sarcasm - these are the things that seem to just *naturally* ooze out of me. And goodness gracious, don’t get me wrong, they have their time and place; my nature makes for entertaining meetings and it aids in great story telling. But in regards to kindness...it doesn’t always seem to be a part of my nature. Lord help me, I’m pretty much up a creek without a paddle. And then the clouds part and it turns out I do have a paddle, only it looks much more like a shovel, a hand pruner, or a trowel.

In his introduction to a series on the Fruit of the Spirit, Del Tarr wrote, “*Gifts are given but fruit is grown. Love, joy, peace, and on down the list in Galatians 5:22,23 – these are commodities that you and I have to grow. Fruitbearing is nothing but hard work.*” I don’t know about you, but this reality seems to both comfort and hurt me. On one hand I feel relieved because that means I’m not behind the curve; in fact it seems I am right where I need to be – very aware of where I am in need of growth. On the other hand, I am also now aware that this growth will require my complicity, my blood, sweat and tears. Okay, maybe blood is a bit dramatic, we are only talking about kindness here, but you get my drift. It calls for the rooting out of old habits and taking care to grow something new and godly in the place of my old nature.

So, I started some research to better understand what kindness really is. What do people mean when they talk about kindness and, more importantly, what

does God mean when He talks about it? The most obvious thing I found in my study is that the world is absolutely desperate for a real demonstration of kindness. I came across secular organizations whose entire purpose is to touch the world with kindness. They offer resources to people on how to be kind—hundreds of ideas, for instance mowing your neighbor’s lawn or anonymously paying for someone’s coffee - and then they challenge people to believe that if they can just get enough people to participate in random acts of kindness on a daily basis the world will get better. The sad thing is that the answer they’ve come up with doesn't actually *lead* to anything more than a few moments of pleasure.

All of this got me thinking. If the world’s idea of kindness leaves us wanting something more, then when God called kindness a fruit of the spirit He must be describing something much more powerful than our rudimentary understanding of the word. I am immediately reminded of what it says in the book of Romans, “that the kindness of God leads to repentance.” Godly kindness ought to lead people somewhere beyond the actual kind word, act, or moment. In fact the word *chrēstotēs*, translated as kindness, used in this passage of Galatians is not simply referring to an act of kindness, although it may be expressed through an action. *Chrēstotēs* seems to require something much deeper than simple action. In a fuller sense, it encompasses integrity and moral goodness; it is the sort of kindness that has an assurance of good motive. It implies kindness for more than kindness’ sake; rather kindness for the sake of Christ - kindness that leads others into His presence.

I know a young woman whose story of how she met the Lord exemplifies this principle. Elizabeth grew up in an extremely dysfunctional home environment where the members of her family were physically, emotionally, verbally and sexually abused. As an adolescent she struggled to make sense of what had happened to her, and her coping turned inward where she was unable to find healing. As many who have experienced abuse, she wrestled greatly with depression, and as a teenager began cutting herself in an attempt to find control

over her pain. Over the span of a few years she attempted suicide several times, spent time in mental hospitals and tried any number of prescriptions to dull the pain.

As a last-ditch effort and with the hopes of starting over, she moved half way across the country where she knew almost no one, and the first real friend she made was a Christian girl named Jessica. Elizabeth tried her best to hold it together and to keep her history a secret. The one thing she was certain of was that people didn't know how to deal with her history of abuse or the self-sabotaging behaviors that had become her go-to coping mechanism. However, as with most secrets, there comes a time when they rear their ugly head, and one night over a confrontation Elizabeth's story began to spill from her lips. She thought deep down that as soon as the conversation was over Jessica would be through with her. She felt her baggage was way too big and destructive; she'd already hurt so many people and others had made it clear that she wasn't wanted.

Elizabeth stood there as she finished, tears streaming down her face, taking deep breaths, bracing herself for what was about to happen. And then the thing she expected least in the world happened; Jessica cried and hugged her, held her. It was the *kindest* thing that anyone had done for her in years. It seems so simple - and it was - but in that moment of intentional kindness, Elizabeth sensed the Lord's presence for the first time and gave her life to Him. She has experienced immense healing since giving her life to the Lord in the years that have followed and now works in full time ministry. When she shares her story of how God transformed her life she always talks about that night, about Jessica's kindness that helped her to sense the kindness of the Lord.

Elizabeth's story helps me to recognize the power behind, and the worth of, allowing the Lord to grow the fruit of kindness in my life. It makes me more willing to lay my personality at the feet of Jesus and ask Him to redeem it and conform it. I think godly kindness takes us slowing down, really considering the

people around us, and then striving to live out and choose kindness in such a way that it draws men unto the Lord.

Most of us aren't intentionally unaware of the needs of others. What we are is ignorant to what people around us need, mostly because we haven't learned to be considerate of others. This has been the "Aha moment" the Lord has shown me in my own life while pursuing the fruit of kindness. Genuine kindness grows out of consideration.

I am one of those strange people who actually enjoy confrontation. I know it's weird, but I like talking honestly about how I feel about things, and I have strong opinions that I am unafraid to share. Here's the thing though, every single one of my closest friends, like we're practically sisters we're so close friends, is the exact opposite. They are all loving and gentle, and yes, very sensitive. For years I operated out of the belief that "I was just being me." Please understand, I don't mean I was being cruel and starting fights, that's not the kind of confrontation I'm talking about, and often what I said in those moments of confrontation was technically "right." But being *considerate* means being thoughtful, attentive, careful and delicate, and I definitely wasn't being any of those.

I wish I could say I've learned how to do this, but that wouldn't be entirely true. However I think what I'm learning is how to lay down my personality, to take the moment to consider the other person, and then to choose the sort of kindness that is pleasing to the Lord. There are times when kindness is a truthful word, affection given, resources shared, or any number of other things. I could give you a list of ideas for you to try, but I don't think it would be the sort of thing that could be called fruit. Instead, how about each of us spends a bit of time letting the Lord examine our personality, then when He reveals a piece that has kept us from kindness let's lay it down and ask Him to redeem it. The next step will be to take some time to be considerate, maybe make a plan for over a week or so to take a few minutes each day to think about our families, professors,

classmates, coworkers, friends - even our enemies - and ask the Lord what sort of kindness it is that they need, and then do it at the very next possible opportunity.

In a world where most everyone, even those who would call themselves religious, have a skewed idea of who God is, those of who know Him have the noble responsibility to represent His character well. People think He is far off, absent, rigid, cruel, but we know Him to be incredibly kind. Yes, He is holy and powerful, but He is gentle, considerate and kind. Remember, it is His kindness that has led us to repentance and a demonstration of godly kindness is exactly what a watching world needs to restore their idea of Him.

GOODNESS by Kyrstopher Scroggins

As sit here to write about the Fruit of the Spirit as Paul describes it in Galatians 5:22, I am overwhelmed with the task. Not because of some theological or philosophical awe, it is there; but more because of the particular topic that fell to me - Goodness. His goodness is overwhelming, but I am more overwhelmed because of the hurt that my heart is burdened with as I sit in this chair. There have come many blows in the last month; professionally, personally, and emotionally. Each one like a searing dart to a part of my soul and spirit not otherwise guarded. This seems to be a fact of life. No one is spared the troubles that inevitably come our way. Suffering seems to be as much a part of life as breathing.

The toll that the slings and arrows take on us bend and warp our minds and personalities in such a way that sometimes we no longer have a clear view of who God is. We become doubled over by burdens and soon we only have a view of ourselves. We often find ourselves standing, hunchbacked, staring at our feet, and cursing the sun for not helping us stand upright. Often times, we let these wounds define our perception of God. There is no other facet of The Divine Personality that is questioned more often than His goodness. How many of us has asked the question, "Why me?" when in times of suffering and sorrow? If He is good, why are we suffering? Why do we see the innocent and weary abused and taken advantage of? If He is good, why do the wicked prosper and evil dance in our streets? The reality is that the *question* of suffering is usually null in the *face* of suffering. In other words, "Why?" is not as important to the broken heart as "What now?" Bad or good, is not the sight of a suffering heart an affront to your spirit? Pain is pain and hurt is hurt. It is an evil that came into the world because of our collective selfishness and regardless of whom suffering strikes, it is always a shame to see.

If God is good, then why is there suffering? The answer is simple: suffering persists because we do. He could easily end all the pain and all the

reasons for us to question His goodness, but in doing so, He would end all of us. When we ask "Why me?" we are assuming a few big things. First, we are throwing ourselves in with the innocent and are proclaiming we are not deserving of the trouble that befalls us. Second, we are excluding ourselves from the ranks of the wicked, which deserve to bear the brunt of all the troubles of the world. The overlooked reality is that because of our own selfish and stupid choices, we deserve every bit and more of the suffering that comes our way.

As much as I would love to proclaim my innocence, I know that on some level it is deserved. This is no masochism - it is just plain fact. I have caused harm to others and therefore, deserve to bear the harm that comes my way. This statement is overly simplistic, yes. However, we must bear this in mind; we are not innocent. We must acknowledge that God did give us good laws. They are not impossible commands, but reasonable descriptions of how the world was intended to work. In our sin, we not only rebelled, but also went against the Laws of Reality, which were given to us to keep us safe. We chose to go against them and in doing so we have caused harm to both ourselves and to those around us.

For example, when we did not forgive that particular person, we were breaking a command that God gave us. We can walk through this example and clearly see what happens. First, we, as the unforgiving ones, holding this wrong in our hearts, would become increasingly bitter and self-centered. The wrong would occupy more and more of our thought patterns until we began to see that wrong in everyone around us. We would circle the wagons, possibly with others that had been wronged in the same way, and become isolated and alone. It always ends that way without forgiveness. The one who wronged us would feel the sting of a broken relationship and because of our hardness of heart, would never be able to have closure or reconciliation. Both of us would then feel the pain of the ending of relationship, which was never part of the plan.

The reason why our souls revolt against suffering is that we were not made for it. We were made for growth and stress, but not suffering. There is a stark contrast. One is like the stiffness and soreness that comes after a good run or workout, and the other is like breaking an arm. One is good and necessary for

health and growth and the other is a life-threatening trauma. The pain that strikes us is an indicator that things are not as they should be, much like a splinter in a finger hurts. The splinter is not supposed to be there. Following this metaphor, the heartbreak we feel at a funeral or after the ending of a long-standing friendship tells us something; people were not meant to die and relationships are not supposed to end. We have broken this world and broken each other. How many hearts have been marred and scarred by our selfish actions? We are the criminals. As such, we cannot accuse God as the source of pain, suffering, and evil. He did not intend it, but we created it. When placed in this context, the grandeur of His goodness begins to shine.

The word *goodness* is a noun that primarily means “having the state or quality of being good.” The dictionary definition of the word *good* is “morally excellent; virtuous; righteous; pious: satisfactory in quality, quantity, or degree: of high quality; excellent: right; proper; fit: well-behaved.” It comes from an Old English word meaning “virtuous, desirable, valid, considerable.” It has its roots in an early Germanic word that meant “fit, adequate, belonging together.” We can get a bit more speculative and trace the word back to one of the first languages spoken on earth, a philological reconstruction called the Proto-Indo-European, and we find a word that meant “to unite, be associated, suitable.” There is a sense of wholeness to the word, a sense of completion. It also has shades of meanings along the lines of worthiness and fitness. It has a satisfying sufficiency about it. It is pious virtue and righteous innocence, but more than all these, *goodness* represents an excellence of moral character.

It is hard to get a grasp on His moral excellence because it is the sum total of God’s myriad attributes in their proper proportions that make Him so good. We can say He is good because He is merciful, yet he administers judgments on mankind and it only adds to His goodness. James S. Stewart, the famed Scottish preacher and theologian put it this way: “He was the meekest and lowliest of all the sons of men: yet He said that He would come on the clouds of heaven in the glory of God. He was so austere that evil spirits and demons cried out in terror at His coming: yet He was so genial and winsome and approachable that the children loved to play with Him, and the little ones nestled in His arms; and His company in the innocent gaiety of a village wedding was like the sunshine. No one was

ever half so kind or compassionate to sinners: yet no one ever spoke such red-hot, scorching words about sin. He would not break the bruised reed, and His whole life was love: yet on one occasion He demanded of the Pharisees how they expected to escape the damnation of hell. He was a dreamer of dreams and a seer of visions: yet for sheer stark naked realism He has all our self-styled "realists" beaten. He was the servant of all, washing the disciples' feet : yet masterfully He strode into the Temple, and the hucksters and traders fell over one another in their mad rush to get away from the fire they saw blazing in His eyes. He saved others: yet at the last, Himself He would not save. There is nothing in history like the union of contrasts that confronts you in the Gospels."It is this sum total of characteristics that make Him good.

But, what does He say about Himself? The view become much more clear when viewed from the summit of the Mount of Olives. In Matthew 5:48, Jesus tells us to "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." What is this command, but a description of our Father's conduct and character? He has told us how to act and then tells us that in so doing, we will be conducting ourselves like our Father in heaven. He describes a character that has the capacity to shake the foundations of the earth and alter history; and He did. More than this, we are reminded that Christ and the Father are one, so the very same person we see in Christ is also the Father and the Spirit.

If this is true, then when we read through the Sermon on the Mount, we are left with not just a mere description of how we should interact with the greater world, but we are staring into the face of our Lord. So, when He says blessed are the meek, the poor in spirit, the hungry for righteousness, and the peacemakers, He is talking about things that He does. When He admonishes us to be quick to reconcile with our enemies and with those we are in conflict with, He is telling what He would do in that situation. Basically, He is saying that you can never take the first step towards reconciliation with him - He is always going to be faster. When He tells us to not let our hearts wander after another, He is really telling us that you are the one He will always desire. He asks us not to be hypocritical and to let our yes be yes because He is not double-minded and His "yes" is a fixed point in the firmament. Most of all, He tells us to bless our enemies for He "sends His rain on the just and unjust alike". The masterful E.

Stanley Jones said it best: “He did not merely ask men to turn the other cheek when smitten on the one, to go the second mile when compelled to go one, to give the cloak also when sued at the law and the coat was taken away, to love our enemies and to bless them—he himself did that very thing. The servants struck him on one cheek, he turned the other and the soldiers struck him on that; they compelled him to go with them one mile—from Gethsemane to the judgment hall—he went with them two—even to Calvary. They took away his coat at the judgment hall and he gave them his seamless robe at the cross; and in the agony of the cruel torture of the cross he prayed for his enemies, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'”

God never waivers. He always does what is right and good. He is the unification of all the traits that we find to be pleasant and applies them in the most perfect way possible. He is good.

Pastor Yonggi Cho, leader of the largest church in the world, reminds his congregation that the gifts are from the Spirit himself, not something external of Him given to us. We have the fruit of the Spirit in proportion to how much we have of Him. He is all of these traits to the infinite degree and gives of Himself so that we may be more like Him.

GENTLENESS by Mary Gautreaux

2 CORINTHIANS 10:1

By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you - I, Paul, who am "timid" when face to face with you, but "bold" toward you when away!

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-5

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

COLOSSIANS 3:12

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

1 TIMOTHY 6:11

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.

1 PETER 3:15-16

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

What do you think of when you hear the word gentleness? Some are going to steer clear of this chapter, assuming it is best left to the elementary education majors. What can gentleness have to do with much of anything? But, there is no denying that it is included in this incredible list of the Fruit of the Spirit, and for that reason, at least, deserves some study.

Some of us have tremendous misconceptions of God. They are formed in all sorts of ways – from the way our parents acted and treated us, from hearing snippets of books and sermons (usually the terrible ones people are mocking on YouTube), from being surrounded by mythology and video games and movies, and mostly from never taking the time to really search for truth. However we formed them, mistaken ideas about the real God of Heaven generally take two very different forms.

First, many have the idea that Jesus was some sort of hippie, maybe with a terrible lisp, who floated helplessly from one place to another before he got himself killed. We have all seen pictures or videos depicting Jesus in this manner, and so many people really think that was who He was and what He was like – it is no wonder that they take no care to seek Him. Nevertheless, this is a very wrong conception of who Jesus really was. People wrongly assume that meek is a synonym for weak. Jesus was gentle and meek, but He certainly was not weak. Dorothy Sayers said it best,

“The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused him of being a bore—on the contrary, they thought him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified him “meek and mild,” and recommended him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies.”

On the other hand, many have the idea that God is only a God of anger and wrath and punishment; that He delights in us doing wrong because then He gets to punish us. First of all, this is wrong because while God is just and mighty, He certainly does not take pleasure in our pathetic choices that result in negative consequences. Jesus, when He was here on earth, revealed to us exactly how God is: He told us, "When you have seen me, you have seen the Father." Yes, Jesus

really did make a whip and drive the corrupt moneychangers out of the court of the Gentiles in the temple in righteous anger. Yes, Jesus really did speak very strongly against sin and selfishness, and spoke the truth about where a life of sin and selfishness will lead, but He was not mean or vindictive.

If you will read the accounts of Jesus' time on earth recorded in the gospels, you will see quickly that anger and justice are not at all the only characteristics He displayed. Studying the Bible, one can plainly see that Jesus was gentle and meek. *"Come to me all you who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* (MATTHEW 11:28-30)

Jesus is not speaking boastfully or braggingly here. He is saying what the whole world needs to understand: *that He loves us and wants to help us.* That God is our heavenly Father who sees our plight and knows how hard it is for us to live in this fallen world. He is approachable and gentle, and He loves us. Just like my own children automatically looked to me for tender care when they fell down as toddlers, so we can look to the Lord!

Isaiah saw Him in this light, and Matthew recognized Jesus in this passage of scripture, and included it in chapter 12:18-21:

ISAIAH 42:1-4

"Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope."

Jesus, the hope of the nations, the king of kings and the lord of lords, is gentle and approachable. He patiently met the needs of the crowds that constantly pushed about him, looking past the throng to see the great need of each one. He healed the sick, spiritually and physically; He brought the dead back to life. He had compassion on people, even to the point of weeping. God is neither a weakling without power, nor a far off being who either doesn't care for us or who loathes us. He is our Father and He is with us, longing to help us; "His yoke is easy and his burden is light."

When I think about God's gentleness I am amazed. To know that the maker of heaven and earth feels the same way about me that I do about my own children is thrilling! My girls are so good and so sweet, but they occasionally have done things over the years that are just plain mean or naughty. Even then, I don't hate them or detest them. I continue to love them. If I can help them, I will. I know that I am not a perfect parent, but I usually have the patience and love for my children to deal with them in a gentle manner. I know that they are young and that they are learning, so I try to help them think through things as they learn right from wrong.

How much more God does for us, His children! He *is* a perfect Father, and He gently leads us, drawing us to Himself by the Holy Spirit, revealing His Son to us in His glory. He graciously accepts us and saves us when we repent. He patiently and tenderly walks with us as we first stumble, and then learn to walk into maturity as Christians. He gently lifts us up and sets us aright if we should fall.

His laws keep us safe, healthy, and whole. His discipline leads us back to the place where we will be out of danger. I love the imagery throughout the Bible of Jesus as shepherd, we as sheep. As anyone who has ever worked around sheep knows, sheep are very - for lack of a better word - stupid. Just like sheep, we are obsessed with ourselves and with our own wellbeing. We tend to be

frightened and distracted by anything that comes along. But, also like sheep, if we can learn to hear our shepherd's voice, we will be safe. Our shepherd cares for us, looks out for us, feeds us, and keeps us safe. Like the psalmist said, *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."* (PSALM 23)

The fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5 are a sampling of God's character reflected through His people. Through the Holy Spirit, the Lord imparts to believers the characteristics of God and the many facets of His personality. So what does this mean for us? It means that as He works in us – transforming us into the image of Jesus – He also wants to work through us. Why gentleness? Gentleness is how, through the Spirit, we can be the person that welcomes the lost one, picks up the fallen, takes the nervous or scared one by the hand, and gently corrects and redirects those who have gone astray.

Just as God deals with each one of us tenderly and gently, He will give us the ability to deal with others in the same gentle manner. He will help us - male and female - to be gentle in our interactions with others. When we walk in step with the Spirit, He will remove our "rough" edges. We will have the gentleness our children need us to have so that they will know they can always come to us no matter what they have done. We will be gentle with our friends and neighbors, and able to lovingly lead them into a closer walk with the Lord. When a person is gentle in manner and in spirit, others are automatically attracted to that. With the help of the Holy Spirit, Christians can be an accurate reflection of God and the help and healing for hurting people all around us.

FAITHFULNESS by Amy Hauck

It all began at the EZ Mart. A few weeks prior to standing in front of the neighborhood gas station with my hands raised above my head in utter frustration, I made the very impulsive decision to adopt a dog from a local rescue agency while my husband was out of town. I rationalized that we had previously discussed canine adoption and this was my chance to surprise him with the most amazing dog ever. Andy was a four-year-old light brown mutt who gravitated toward me the minute I got him out of the cage. He had all appearances of the playful, loyal dog I imagined owning as he followed me around the adoption center and sidled up next to me as I signed his papers. I was thrilled.

My daughter and I took him home and prepared the back yard to be his playground. From bones to toys to buying all the startup items of leash, collar and the like, we were set. Quality time? You bet. We bought him the best food, took him on walks – all the things a responsible dog owner is supposed to do. When my husband returned from his trip, he was surprised at my impulsiveness, but after spending some time with our incredible pooch, he too was convinced that Andy was the best dog. Ever. That is, until he started to run.

After two weeks of marking every tree and bush in our half-acre back yard, it seemed that it wasn't enough. The urge to wander set in and he did just that. He could easily climb up and over our five-foot fence to launch his exploration of the neighborhood, and he was impossible to catch, unless he wanted to be caught. The first time he disappeared, Andy slipped out of his collar and bolted. I was devastated. Why, after all the time, love and affection I had given him, was he bent on escaping from me? I searched Craigslist the next morning and found this ad: "FOUND at the EZ Mart by UTSA, 40-pound male dog. Seems like someone's pet because he is well trained and very sweet."

It was Andy! She brought him back that morning and we were reunited, only to discover that this was not the end of Andy's escapades. A few days later he slipped out of his collar, climbed the fence on the other side this time and was gone for two weeks. When we finally located him thanks to a FOUND sign – where do you think his rescuer discovered him? The EZ Mart, of course. We finally bought him a harness that he couldn't slip off, and when he discovered how to escape the backyard again (despite electricity and fence alterations) a man called me from - you guessed it, the EZ Mart - to report he had been found. Andy would gladly go to most any stranger. In fact I once watched him leap recklessly into the minivan of a very surprised family trying to leave the gas station.

That was it. By this point I had lost track of how many times I stood at the neighborhood corner store, leash and treats in hand, only to realize that no matter how many times I brought him "home", Andy was intent to wander back to his seedy paradise. My amazing dog had turned out to be utterly unfaithful and it seemed that no amount of training, coaxing, or quality time would cure him of his itinerant heart. He would always be a runner. I surprised myself as I began to think, "Fine! Let him get hit by a car then if he's so intent on leaving! I can't keep protecting him from himself!" Or, "Let someone else take him home! I don't care what happens to him anymore!" Immediately the Holy Spirit spoke to me: "What if your Heavenly Father gave up on you every time you wandered?" It was as if all air had been sucked from my lungs. I thought back to the Old Testament accounts of the Israelites and the history of wandering that we so closely mirror in this contemporary age. A heaviness came over me as I caught a glimpse of the utter frustration God must feel with a fickle and irresponsible people who have the best offered to them, yet exchange it for a false sense of freedom and a cheapened existence. As frustrated as I was at continually chasing a dog I was desperately trying to protect and provide for, my hurt could in no way compare to the way in which mankind has wounded the heart of God by being content to play with mud pies in the gutter when offered a vacation at the sea, as C.S. Lewis terms it.

This is something that began to trouble me. If my exhaustion over chasing a dog had reached its limit in a matter of weeks, how was it possible that God, in all his majesty, would continually pursue a people that were cognizant of their decisions, and perhaps even the impact therein, yet chose to wander anyway? Obviously this is an attribute that he deeply values; he chooses to experience the hurt of disappointment over and over rather than ever compromising this portion of his character. However, despite the impact of human selfishness on God's heart, He is permanently free of all bitterness, and instead continues to extend an open hand to each of us despite our roving affections. Thus, God is no cosmic pushover; He is powerful, just, and more fiercely faithful than any person or creature throughout history as we know it – all of this without harboring a secret cynicism or jaded attitude toward that which he is faithful to. This is a feat that is much more difficult and virtuous than simply giving up. He always has hope for reconciliation and restoration.

As I thought about it more, I realized that the very nature of the word faithfulness is digital; it's either on or off. I remember trying to explain to the gas station attendant, the lady from Craigslist, the girl from the pet hospital around the corner (who helped me chase him numerous times), and the UTSA football player that brought Andy home after pumping his gas: "He really is a sweet dog! He is so obedient and faithful . . . as long as he is fenced in and I'm with him, he's great!" I was afraid they would think that I was abusing him or giving him some reason to escape life with us. Looking back, I'm sure it sounded ridiculous to all of them – Andy was not faithful at all! Imagine if God promised to be only 76 percent faithful to his children. This would then compromise other parts of his character that we depend on more than we realize: could I fully trust someone like this? It is the same way with us – God is looking for a people who are willing to get on their own cross, empty themselves, and be filled up with His Spirit. He is looking for a people he can trust. No good husband would peaceably accept that his wife was 93 percent faithful to him. There is that troubling 7 percent that would always plague his thoughts. It didn't matter to me that most of the time,

Andy was a sweet and submissive dog, and even well trained. He would never come into the house unless invited, he was housebroken, could sit, stay, fetch and followed me closely all around the back yard and in the house. What mattered was that, in the end, despite all the training and “good” behavior that he exhibited when confined, he would always choose to wander when given the opportunity.

This brought up another idea as I pondered my doggie adventures: Faithfulness is not contingent upon location or proximity to other believers or Christian fellowship. When we are surrounded by Christian community, it is easy to pat each other on the back for doing all the “right” things, or checking off our list of small group, devotional time, church attendance, and more. These are all *wonderful* and *necessary* practices to mature our walk with God, however, are all of these things accompanied by a steadfast and faithful heart that God can trust outside the constructs of Christian community? Is our faithfulness dependent on location and proximity to other believers? Does it rest on whether or not our life expectations are being met? Or is it a feeling? Certainly not. This attribute of godly character is one of the pinnacles of Christian maturity, because true faithfulness rests in the person and character of Jesus Christ. If we can become more like Him and fall in love with who He is, then perhaps His Spirit can bear the fruit of faithfulness in us. This is one of the traits of a Christian soldier that is “combat ready” for any mission.

One more thing that crossed my mind was this: we will all be faithful to an entity of some kind. Ultimately, what we are faithful to will be the things we place value in. In Andy’s case, the smell of the fast food restaurants and dumpster trash that surrounded the EZ Mart enclave along with the constant traffic of new and interesting people was such a rush, that no matter how much bacon I added to his dog food, no matter how many times I would throw the ball for him, and no matter how long I would scratch his belly, he was ultimately faithful to his idea of the “greatest existence.” What he didn’t realize was his vulnerability to the cars on the busy highway nearby, or the disease-ridden rats and other creatures that lived in and around the dumpsters, among other things. Sure, he’s just a dog, but

how often are we guilty of doing the same? For example: Am I more faithful to _____ (you fill in the blank) than enriching my mind with the Word of God each day? This dilemma could show itself in many different ways. It amazes me that we can look at scripture and see what God places ultimate value in, through what He is faithful to: His children.

I felt ashamed when I realized how quickly I had reached my threshold for chasing Andy and how speedily my heart was hardened toward this dog I had “rescued” from the shelter. In this instant - when I realized how unfaithful my heart really was – God very tenderly, but truthfully exposed what was in my own heart in contrast to His own. It is much, much easier to give up. But how is it possible that through epochs of history, God has remained the same, as scripture says, “yesterday, today, and forever”? The answer came as I began to think about Him and realized that His character encompasses all that is faithful – He literally *is* faithfulness. If I am taking on the mantle of being Christ’s Ambassador as it says in 2 Corinthians 5:20, then I must become *like* Him. He is a tireless reconciler – the possibility of restored relationship with Him would always be an option no matter how disillusioned and far from Him people may have carried themselves. True faithfulness finds its roots in daily, consistent obedience to God. It means that we cannot always claim our rights, or be driven by emotion, but must be steadfastly committed to seeing His bigger picture.

If God does this for each of us on our journey toward holiness, how much more should we then pray that this attribute would become an integral part of our own character? Who have I given up on too quickly because it was simply “too hurtful” or “too frustrating” to continue? Without faithfulness, we cannot fully know Him or make Him known. May we see with His eyes and hear with His ears, and may we become a faithful generation that is steadfast and moving forward with vision for serving and knowing the King in His Kingdom.

SELF-CONTROL by Eli Stewart

GALATIANS 5:17

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

GALATIANS 6:8-9

For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

Self-control is the last in the list of qualities that flow from the Spirit of God living in us. Each of these traits is a declaration of value. Self-control is a declaration that the appetites, desires and longings we have will not ruin the life we have become alive to in Him. It is obvious that, for this to be true, His Spirit must have to come alive in us. “*Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls,*” (PSALM 42:7) declares the psalmist. The sound of the Spirit excites our spirit.

There are three types of desires: Physical, emotional, and spiritual. It seems that spiritual appetites and physical appetites often intersect with our emotional appetites. This is confusing, because some appetites we would normally call purely spiritual become fleshly, and some we would consider purely fleshly, can actually be spiritual. For instance, eating is a necessity for living, but when it becomes an emotional integration point it becomes gluttony. Prayer is a spiritual privilege. However, it can be done for religious reasons and in our bodies only, becoming fleshly.

GALATIANS 5:17,23

For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please ... self control; against such things there is no law.

Desires are appetites. They are hunger for things. Often times we can't help appetites, but just because we "hunger and thirst" for a thing doesn't mean we have to feed it. An appetite, a longing, or a desire tries to convince us that we must fulfill it before we can move on. But if we don't say "no" to competing appetites, we will never develop the spiritual muscle that we call **self-control**.

Self-control is literally refusing to be ruled by the fallen appetites of a fallen body. This passage in Galatians says the desires of the body lust against the desires of the spirit. This word for lust, *epithumeo*, is best understood as a maneuvering. When an appetite arises and we begin to maneuver in our circumstance to meet that desire, even if we haven't actually met it yet, we are intending to. We have made a decision in heart to fulfill an appetite - this is lust.

You'll notice in the list from Galatians:

GALATIANS 5:19-21

"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like: of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Everything in this list is rooted in an appetite undenied. This appetite undenied is the appetite that says, "me first". The good news is that someone in love with Jesus has the ability and desire to say no to competing appetites. We have the ability and desire to say "Jesus" instead of "me."

It is fitting that self-control is listed last in the fruit of the Spirit. It does prevent appetites from ruling, but the primary strategy isn't in saying no to things, it is in saying yes to God. It is impossible and not desirable to live a life of only saying no - there must be something greater to put into the space vacated by our appetites. Self-control acknowledges that the external affects the internal, but the fruit of the Spirit demands that the internal must affect the external. Our ability to even be self-controlled flows from God's Spirit inside saying, "these appetites are fickle and fleeting and will not last for eternity"

Fasting is a great example. In the Bible, fasting is the going without something so that the appetite can be turned to prayer. It is not complete to simply go without food. Fasting and prayer always go together. When we are fasting food and feel hungry, we are meant to say no to the feeling of hunger, but also to turn our gaze to heaven and "feed" on something greater. Jesus modeled this in **LUKE 4:4**: *"But Jesus answered him, saying, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God'."*

This means we are to find more sustenance, more survivability, more comfort, and more nutrition in time with God than anything else. This may seem impossible, but as with fasting it starts with saying "yes" to God by saying "no" to an appetite – one thing at a time.

If you fast for just lunch and breakfast, you feel starved when it is time for dinner. If you fast for one whole day your appetite in the morning will be voracious. Typically the first three days of fasting, you will feel like you are starving, but if you keep fasting (without cheating) through those three days your appetite will disappear. We think our bodies tell us in the first hunger we feel that we are starving. We are not. In reality it is not our body that is dying, it is our appetite. For many people who continue to fast, their hunger disappears until the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and even 5th week of fasting. It really is possible to fast as Jesus fasted. Many have and are still alive! Regardless of the time that passes after the first hunger goes away, the second hunger is an indicator of actual starvation. It

is this time that our bodies appetites are actually in line with reality. This is the time to listen to your body and eat again.

For many who fast, they will often have smoothies and other cheater foods to help satisfy their appetite. They are doing without solid food, but are helping their appetite stay alive and as a result will never be free of its grip. For these people, fasting is a near constant torment. They are saying no to regular food, but not killing their appetite. This is why so many of us are surprised to find our actions in the list of works of the flesh - it is because we have not fully said no to them. We keep them alive by feeding them minimally.

You will discover that, oftentimes, whenever an appetite screams loudest in your mind will be just before it dies. This is the heart of fasting - for appetites to lose their ability to usurp our will. There is no other real way to be free of an appetite that influences our will than to be consistent in telling it no. You don't train a dog to sit by telling it once with tears in your eyes, "Please sit". Instead, it is by simple repetition - doing it over and over and over until the dog sits at every command. This what the apostle Paul meant when he said, *"No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."* (1 CORINTHIANS 9:27)

Self-control is allowing the Holy Spirit to develop habits in our body that prevent appetites from overtaking the Spirit inside us. The devil loves to point out thousands of steps we should have taken so that we do not take the next one Jesus desires for us. But we often say that conviction is the next step to intimacy with Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is putting His finger one or two appetites in our lives right now as we read this. Do not let the devil derail this by pointing to all your wrong steps. Apologize to Jesus, ask him to forgive you for them, and ask him which area (if you don't know already) needs to be brought into self-control right now so that it doesn't compete with our appetite for godliness. The devil's accusations

are like fiery arrows. They can even be true sometimes. But his intentions are never pure. We can learn to say, “Be silent,” to the devil.

Many of us are ruled by the appetites of our bodies, like sleep, sex, hunger, or exercise. Others are ruled by emotional appetites like a desire for acceptance, safety, security, or even by our personality traits like being short-tempered, having a tendency toward depression, being hypersensitive, overly-serious, or constantly silly. All of these, and many others like them, are emotional appetites that cover the image of God in us.

But these things can be overcome with the help of the Holy Spirit. We can fast anger. We can say, “this week when I get angry I will put my mind on Jesus instead.” Every time anger rises, we can end its rule over our lives by being consistent in telling it “no” until, like a dog, it sits until the appropriate time. Our emotions need not overrule our desire for intimacy with Jesus! The same can be said for depression. We may say, “this week I will not believe the lie that I am alone. Instead I will talk to Jesus”. Soon the emotional stronghold of depression can be defeated. Everything in us can be taken to the cross. God’s sovereign hand can resurrect whatever He desires, and we will find that in this way we are “Being Made New.”

As we sense God putting his finger on an appetite that has been affecting our will, it is time to fast. Not simply do without, but actively turn the desire to prayer. Every time you feel “hungry” for the thing, turn to God in prayer: “Oh Lord Your spirit in me and my desire for you is much more important than this thing. I praise you, Oh Lord, for being my King.” In prayer, don’t keep the attention on the offending appetite. Instead, turn it to the better thing - God Himself. Praise Him for Who He is, for what He has done, and for His hope – and rejoice as He develops the fruit of the Spirit in your life.

“Against such things there is no law.”