

Moments *for* You

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Theme: Fruit of The Spirit



THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

The Apostle Paul describes “the fruit of the Spirit” as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). These qualities reflect God’s character and the behavior of those living according to God’s Spirit.

When we become connected to God through Jesus Christ, we’re like new branches that are grafted into a living vine, which begin to yield the fruit of that vine (see John 15:1-11). So if God is loving, patient, and always emanating peace, then as we participate with God, we will bear that same spiritual fruit, like love, patience, and peace.

We can better understand the nature and purpose of these spiritual fruits by exploring their source and the nuanced way they connect with other parts of Scripture.

By describing these characteristics as the fruit of the Spirit, the Apostle Paul is saying they come from the Holy Spirit, who is God. The Spirit cultivates them within us.

We cannot produce “spiritual fruit” on our own; we can’t simply will ourselves to be more gentle or work harder to be more joyful or faithful. But Scripture does suggest that human beings somehow take part in providing the conditions for the growth of spiritual fruit. In order for the life of the vine to grow fruit in us, we have to firmly connect ourselves to the vine by pursuing God’s way of life over our own.

When writing his letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul expresses frustration because many are discon-

necting from God’s way of life. Rather than trusting Jesus’ Gospel, they’ve begun to follow a “different gospel” (see Galatians 1:6-7). As a result, they’re accepting or rejecting one another based on human traditions and social status, instead of sharing and experiencing God’s gracious love with each other. They’re embracing a way of division that opposes God’s Spirit and works against the loving, unifying gospel of Christ (see Galatians 3:28-29).

So Paul teaches them to return to Jesus’ real gospel and to participate with (rather than oppose) the Spirit’s work, which provides the conditions needed for spiritual fruit to grow. Paul encourages people to “walk [or live] by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16). But what does that really mean?

Some traditions describe walking by the Spirit as a kind of personal surrender to the Spirit’s transforming work in our minds and hearts. As the Spirit changes our hearts, our behavior also changes, leading us to bear fruit. Other traditions suggest that walking by the Spirit is about choosing to trust God by following His instruction. For example, the choice to love and forgive our neighbor is also a choice to participate with God’s Spirit, which leads to more and more spiritual fruit.

However we understand the mysterious interplay between divine and human action, Paul invites us to cooperate with what the Spirit is doing in us. In this way, we can join in God’s work of restoring all things, including our own lives: producing fruit that brings healing and wholeness to the world around us.

—BibleProject, bibleproject.com, adapted

LOVE: THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Within the greatest commandment are two imperatives: “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart ... you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:28-31). Love is the core of the instruction.

But what does it mean to love? We use that word rather loosely in our day. We say we love our spouse and children, but also say we love our local baseball team and mint chocolate chip ice cream. Has the word lost some of its meaning? I think so.

Love is a choice stemming from knowledge and extending to action. God’s kind of love is ongoing, never ending, never wavering, never doubting, believing the best and working diligently to see it come to fruition. God’s kind of love is also sacrificial. It costs something. It’s not easy, but it understands the value of the person it loves and will pay the price to make sure the very best is extended.

God’s kind of love is grounded in truth. It doesn’t pretend, or excuse or live in false reality. But it overcomes the challenges that truth often presents and finds a way to communicate just how good God’s truth and grace really are. The Apostle Paul writes on love extensively in 1 Corinthians 13.

The greatest commandment is a commandment to love—to want, and to pursue God’s best. And the first part pertains to God Himself. Do we really want God’s best for us in terms of our relationship with Him? In Scripture, we learn that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick and difficult to understand (Jeremiah 17:9). As the CEO of self, our hearts need to be transformed by the gospel of the kingdom and the

power of the Holy Spirit. The good news is that what has been broken by sin and guided by a fallen world, can be radically renewed by grace, faith, and spiritual disciplines.

One of the greatest joys we can experience comes from knowing that we can, in fact, come to a place where we truly do love (persistently and sacrificially pursue the best for) the Lord our God with all our hearts.

—Jay Armstrong, The Bonhoeffer Project, adapted

Joy

When it comes to joy, we are all about it. And this is not problematic; God has created us to be joy seekers. The problem is when we seek joy in the wrong places. We are looking at the fruit of the Spirit—fruit that grows and flourishes not because of us or from us but because we are connected to God, the epitome of highest joy. We are like a tree planted by streams of water (Psalm 1:3), and we will yield God’s good fruit from His good Spirit as we remain planted in Him.

Let us start by describing what joy is not, according to God’s Word:

- Joy is not found in worldly pleasures (Ecclesiastes 2:10–11).
- Joy is not dependent on the absence of suffering (James 1:2).
- Joy cannot be bought by money or found in possessions (Proverbs 8:19).
- Joy does not mean always putting on a happy face (John 11:35).
- Joy is not shallow and does not shift (John 16:22).

According to our Savior, joy is found not in our circumstances but in knowing Him: “In Your presence there is fullness of joy” (Psalm 16:11). No one can take our joy from us because no one can take our Lord from us. True Christian joy, then, is satis-

faction in the presence of God, who is full of endless and unconquerable gladness in Himself.

Joy is also rooted in hope. While suffering and dying—a seemingly despairing event—the Son of God hoped in God’s joyful purpose: to make known to us His glory. This was the joy set before Jesus, the joy that enabled Him to walk through opposition, betrayal, pain, and death—and into eternal life. And it is the same joy—God’s joy—that will enable us to do the same.

So, when opposition arises, when betrayal comes, when pain assaults, when testing assails, when depression descends, when death itself approaches, what will remain for us? Our deep and abiding joy in God. No one can take our joy from us because no one can take God’s Spirit from us; our joy remains because He does.

—Taken from “What Makes God Joyful? Reflections on Joy” by Kristen Wetherell, ©2024, www.crossway.org. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187.

PEACE

Peace is “the way things ought to be.” Peace with God begins with a right relationship with Him. It is evidence of the Holy Spirit working in us. Peace comes as we live life with God, loving and knowing Him. God’s peace comes because we trust who He is.

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8,9).

Because we have peace with God, we can know peace within our own lives. Our worry, resentment and cares can be given to Jesus. *“I have*

said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Peace even when we face troubles because of the Holy Spirit in us.

Peace with God and within us is the foundation of peace with others. *“Let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace” (Colossians 3:15 NLT).*

Paul reminds us in Romans that we belong to each other. Shalom, the peace of God, brings wholeness to relationships, the way things should be. Allow the Holy Spirit to bring peace in your life. First, be sure your relationship with God is right. Cast your cares on Him, knowing He will bring peace within your life. Finally, work for peace with others. Where there is discord, ask God to bring wholeness. Where there is misunderstanding, ask for God’s wisdom. Pray for peace in our world.

—Commissioner Evie Diaz, used by permission of The Salvation Army.

THE GLORY IN LONGSUFFERING

To be longsuffering is to have patience and self-restraint while one is in a challenge. Romans 5:3-4 adds, “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”

Rejoicing in our sufferings is not usually our first response. It truly takes an eternal perspective to remember that God works all things for good, leading us closer to God’s perfect will for our lives and the lives of those around us.

Consider these trials endured by pillars of the faith found in the Bible:

- Abraham and Sarah had been trying to get pregnant. At 90 years old it seemed impossible.
- Caleb wandered in the wilderness for 40 years and was mocked for trusting God.
- Paul was attacked and left for dead, and was in prison for many years.
- Daniel was thrown into the lion's den.
- Job lost his possessions, children, and health.
- Joseph was sold into slavery and imprisoned.
- Jesus was persecuted and hung on a cross.

If you are currently in a season of suffering, I encourage you to think back on the times God has walked you through a trial and consider the eternal perspective of why you may be going through one now. I can honestly say I'm grateful for what God has accomplished in my life, and I'm confident these biblical examples would all say the same. Each trusted God through their trials and the outcomes proved it.

- Abraham became the father of many nations.
- Caleb entered the promised land.
- Paul continued to teach and write about God, even from prison.
- The lion's mouth was shut and Daniel was not harmed.
- The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.
- Joseph was elevated to a position of prominence in Egypt, and rescued many nations (including his own family) from famine.
- Jesus is resurrected and saves all who choose to follow Him.

Periods of longsuffering give us greater stamina to pray for others and more compassion for the hurting. It removes some of the blinders that

this world creates, such as busyness and desires for earthly things. I pray that your trial is doing these things for you, too, as you lay your burdens down at His feet.

"After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you" (1 Peter 5:10).

—Debbie Ryan, adapted from <https://www.medishare.com/blog/longsuffering>

INWARD GOODNESS, OUTWARD KINDNESS

"Be kind" campaigns have been popular in recent years. The phrase often pops up on yard signs, event banners, and social media hashtags. The idea is simple enough, communicating the desire for a more peaceful society in which we choose to be nice to others, rather than mean, vengeful, or judgmental. At the same time, the phrase is vague and subjective. What is kindness? How do we know if we're being kind? How is kindness measured?

God is described in Scripture as the only One who is "good": "No one is good except God alone" (Luke 18:19). He is the very nature, or character, of uprightness and honor. Apart from His Spirit living in us, we are not good or righteous (see Romans 3:10, 23). Only through His Spirit working in us can we be filled with goodness, and this means having the innate ability to judge between right and wrong—what's good and what's not—and even correct others who are not showing "goodness" (see Romans 15:14). Goodness is a fruit given by God to those who, through faith and trust in Jesus Christ, go from darkness to light, who are now able to discern what things are ac-

ceptable to the Lord (see Ephesians 5:8-10).

Those who are transformed by God's goodness can glorify the name of Jesus Christ through their words and deeds (see 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12). This can also be termed "kindness": goodness in action. This, too, is not something that people can do apart from the Spirit's work: "no one does good, not even one" (Romans 3:12). While "goodness" allows us to judge right from wrong and to know the way to salvation, "kindness" is a fruit of the Spirit that allows us to act toward someone in grace, tenderness, and compassion, desiring to show them that way.

Kindness, also, has been modeled by God, particularly through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His kindness was an act of mercy, providing salvation, regeneration and renewal through the Holy Spirit to all who would put their faith and trust in Jesus (Titus 3:4-5). This kindness of God allows us to have an eternal home in Heaven with Him (Ephesians 2:4-7). This requires us to turn away from our sinful nature and accept His gift of cleansing and salvation: "God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance" (Romans 2:4).

Through the Holy Spirit in us, God displays His innate character of goodness and His acts of kindness toward others. He enables us to act justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him (see Micah 6:8), as we point others to the way of salvation. —Tricia Kline

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE FAITHFUL?

Being faithful to God means that there will be some evidence of our faith in God. A faithful Christian will produce fruit.

Faithfulness does not mean that we will be perfect. It does not mean that we won't struggle or that we won't make poor decisions. It does mean that we will continue to trust in God and try to follow His commandments even when life is difficult.

In the parable of the talents in Luke 16:10, Jesus says: "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much."

God knows our capabilities. He knows that we're not all given the same talents and opportunities. He doesn't expect the same results from all of us. But He does want us to do something good with the talents and resources that we are given.

Being faithful is not limited to our relationship with God. We must also strive to be faithful in our relationships with other people.

Probably the most common form of faithfulness that comes to mind is in our marriage relationships. The Bible tells us that spouses should be faithful to one another. Part of faithfulness is avoiding adultery, but it's more than that. Husbands and wives are meant to encourage one another in God, actively loving each other, and patiently caring for each other's needs (Ephesians 5:25).

Another way we can show faithfulness is in our friendships. The Bible deeply values friendships and there are many instances of loyalty between friends (see Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 and Proverbs 27:9-10).

Being faithful in friendship means offering godly counsel, carrying each other's burdens, and remaining loyal through hardships.

The good news is we don't have to produce this faithfulness alone! God promises to give us strength when we need it! (See Isaiah 40:29-31.)

If you're feeling faint, if you're feeling tired, if you're feeling weary, know that God is there to help. God's faithfulness to us gives us the strength to be faithful people.

—Love Worth Finding, condensed

RESTORING THE VIRTUE OF MEEKNESS

The shift in American culture from character to image has turned vanity and pride into virtues. The strong, the beautiful, the powerful, the intelligent, and the privileged take every opportunity to put themselves forward.

Probably the least admired character quality in America is meekness. And yet the greatest Person who ever lived was a meek and humble man—“learn from Me, for I am gentle [meek] and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29). Those who follow Him will also demonstrate meekness, or gentleness as fruit of a Spirit-filled life (Galatians 5:22).

Meekness is not weakness; it is power under control. As the writer of Proverbs says, “Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city” (Proverbs 16:32). In contrast, the individual who is not gentle is likened to “a city broken into and left without walls” (Proverbs 25:28). Gentleness always uses its resources appropriately, unlike the out-of-control emotions that so often are destructive and have no place in your life as a believer.

And don't equate gentleness with cowardice, lack of conviction, or mere human niceness. It's a virtue that draws courage, strength, conviction, and a good disposition from God, not from self-centered human resources.

Gentleness characterizes our Lord

Jesus Christ. He always defended God's glory and ultimately gave Himself in sacrifice for others (see 1 Peter 2:21-24). Jesus didn't lash back when criticized, slandered, or treated unjustly, but He did respond fittingly and firmly when God's honor was profaned or His truth was perverted or neglected.

When His time of suffering came, however, Jesus submitted to the will of His Father and endured the abuse and murderous intentions of the hypocritical leaders. He demonstrated meekness to the very end. “When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23).

For some, meekness leads to suffering. “For Your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered” (Romans 8:36). But there is triumph for the meek, even in suffering—“In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

Meekness is a path worth following. Jesus promised, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).

—Adapted from *The Quest for Character*, by John MacArthur. © Copyright 2006. All rights reserved.

SELF-CONTROL AND THE POWER OF CHRIST

It's not a flashy concept or an especially attractive idea. It doesn't turn heads or grab headlines. It can be as seemingly small as saying no to another Oreos, French fry, or milkshake—or another half hour on Netflix or Facebook—or it can feel as significant as living out a resounding yes to sobriety and sexual purity.

Alongside love and godliness, self-control serves as a major summary term for Christian conduct (2 Timothy 1:7; 2 Peter 1:6). It is the climactic “fruit of the Spirit” in the apostle’s famous list (Galatians 5:22–23) and one of the first things that must be characteristic of leaders in the church (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8).

The idea of controlling one’s own self presumes at least two things: 1) the presence of something within us that needs to be bridled and 2) the possibility of drawing on some source of power to restrain it. For the born-again, our hearts are new, but the poison of indwelling sin still courses through our veins.

Biblically, self-control, or lack thereof, goes to the deepest part of us: the heart. It begins with control of our emotions, and then includes our minds as well (1 Timothy 3:2). Self-control is bodily and external, too. The apostle disciplines his body to “keep it under control” (1 Corinthians 9:25–27). It can mean not being “slaves to much wine” (Titus 2:3–5). And in particular, the language of self-control often has sexual overtones. Paul instructs Christians to “abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust” (1 Thessalonians 4:3–5).

True self-control is a gift from above, produced in and through us by the Holy Spirit. But we also need to note that self-control is not a gift we receive passively, but actively. We are not the source, but we are intimately involved. We open the gift and live it.

You may be able to trick yourself into some semblance of true self-control. You may be able to drum up the willpower to just say no. But you alone get the glory for that—which

will not prove satisfying enough for the Christian.

We want Jesus to get glory. We want to control ourselves in the power He supplies. We learn to say no, but we don’t just say no. We admit the inadequacy, and emptiness, of doing it on our own. We pray for Jesus’ help, secure accountability, and craft specific strategies. We trust God’s promises to supply the power for every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8; Philippians 4:19) and then act in faith that He will do it in and through us (Philippians 2:12–13). And then we thank Him for every Spirit-supplied strain and success and step forward in self-control.

Ultimately, it is about being controlled by Christ. When “the love of Christ controls us” (2 Corinthians 5:14), when we embrace the truth that He is our sovereign, and God has “left nothing outside His control” (Hebrews 2:8), we can bask in the freedom that we need not muster our own strength to exercise self-control, but we can find strength in the strength of another. In the person of Jesus, “the grace of God has appeared ... training us”—not just “to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions,” but “to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Titus 2:11–12). Christian self-control is not finally about bringing our bodily passions under our own control, but under the control of Christ by the power of His Spirit.

Because self-control is a gift, produced in and through us by God’s Spirit, Christians can and should be the people on the planet most hopeful about growing in self-control. In Jesus, we have a source for true self-control far beyond our feeble selves.

—David Mathis, from www.desiringgod.org, condensed