

# *The* Good News

Article Reprint

## The Fruit of the Spirit





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# Jesus Christ's Command to Us: Bear Good Fruit and Much Fruit

*Jesus Christ taught important spiritual lessons regarding the “fruit” of our lives. What are those lessons, and how well are we applying them? Our eternal life depends on this understanding!*

by Don Hooser

**A**t the mention of fruit, what are your first thoughts? A snack? A dessert? Your favorite fruits?

The Bible refers to literal fruit—such as olives, grapes and figs—many times. More frequently the biblical Hebrew and Greek words translated “fruit” have a symbolic sense. All crops are considered “fruit of the earth.” Children are called the “fruit of the womb.” A man’s words are “the fruit of his mouth.”

In ancient and modern times, people have used “fruit” to mean *results, products, outcomes, accomplishments and achievements*. An employee must be *productive* to be worthy of his wage. He must work hard, work fast and work smart to *get jobs done and done right*. In Scripture, “fruit” has similar meanings.

## Defining “good” fruit

The Bible at times likens people to fruit trees or grapevines and portrays God as the owner of the orchards and vineyards. The Master knows our character by our spiritual fruits, just as “a tree is known [identified] by its fruit”—either good or bad (Matthew 12:33).

God’s number one concern is for all fruit to be *good*—“the fruit of righteousness” (James 3:18). In fact, Jesus warned, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and is thrown into the fire” to be destroyed (Matthew 7:19).

And what is *good*? Only God has the supreme authority to define good and evil. Jesus went on to say, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who *does the will of My Father* in heaven” (Matthew 7:21, emphasis added throughout).

And what is God’s will for our lives? It is revealed throughout His Word and is summarized by the two great commandments and the Ten Commandments (Matthew 22:36-40; 19:17).

We must aim high to reach the highest goals. To produce the best fruit requires

work, time, patience and perseverance (James 5:7-11).

## We are to be fruitful

Closely following God’s desire for good fruit is His desire for us to produce a lot of it—to be *highly productive*. Jesus said, “This is to my Father’s glory, that you *bear much fruit*, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8, New International Version). Notice, bearing abundant fruit glorifies God and identifies Christ’s disciples!

Later, Jesus states the purpose of our calling: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you *to go and bear fruit*—fruit that will last” (John

**“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”**

15:16, NIV). Hence we must be oriented toward eternal goals and work with all our hearts to bring them to fruition!

The following parable is quite instructive: “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down’” (Luke 13:6-9).

The keeper of the vineyard asked for another year, during which time he would fertilize the soil to encourage growth. This illustrates God’s patience with us—how He is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

A fruitless fruit tree, however, will eventually be “cut down.” *Professing* without *producing* is no good.

## We are to grow

The similar parables in Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27 illustrate God’s emphasis on spiritual growth and accomplishment. In each story, two servants obediently invested the master’s money to earn a profit for him. But the third servant merely hid the money for safekeeping. Fear of failure was his excuse for not even trying.

The parable shows that we must obey God with faith and courage even when it may be humanly frightening. The fearful servant is called “unprofitable” and

“wicked and lazy” (Matthew 25:30, 26).

To each of the profitable (*fruitful*) servants, the master said, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matthew 25:21, 23). May this be what we hear when Christ returns to reward His servants!

## We can’t bear fruit without God

During His life on earth, Jesus Christ said of His miraculous acts, “The Son can do nothing of Himself” (John 5:19). He explained, “The Father who dwells in Me does the works” (John 14:10).

Neither can we, acting on our own, produce spiritual fruit! It requires a miracle of God through Christ. Let’s carefully read and ponder what Jesus explained to His disciples the evening before His arrest.

He said: “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in

Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:1-2). “Pruning” includes the Father’s loving discipline to correct our faults (Hebrews 12:5-11).

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, *bears much fruit*; for *without Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:4-5). Rely on God and great things will happen!

“If anyone does not abide in Me,” Jesus continued, “he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” (verses 6-7). Abiding in Christ includes *learning and applying God’s Word*. And a major key to bearing fruit is *praying* for help!

Abiding in Christ also includes abiding in His Church, “the body of Christ,” as numerous scriptures show (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27; Ephesians 1:21-22; 4:12).

### The essential role of God’s Spirit

Jesus said we can bear fruit *only if He “abides” in us* (John 15:4-5). How is this possible? It is through the gift of God’s Holy Spirit dwelling in us.

How do we receive this gift? Peter said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

God’s Spirit does many things. It imparts spiritual understanding (1 Corinthians 2:10-14). It imparts a willingness to obey—to be like Christ who said, “Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). It imparts an ability to obey and love far above human ability. It is the Spirit “of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

### The power to bear fruit

With the Holy Spirit, one becomes spiritually alive, beginning a new life! God’s Spirit is like the life-giving sap that flows up the trunk of a tree to all its branches so they can yield fruit!

Notice God’s beautiful portrayal of His people as flourishing fruit trees: “Blessed

is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, *nor will cease from yielding fruit*” (Jeremiah 17:7-8; compare Psalm 1:3).

The apostle Paul said in Galatians 5, “Walk in the Spirit . . . If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (verses 16, 25). God’s Spirit enables us to act according to God’s principles—to live a godly life!

Without God’s Spirit, we are merely mortal flesh, and the fruits of raw human nature are called the “works of the flesh” in verses 19-21. After listing these sinful “works,” Paul warns that “those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (verse 21).

With the help of God’s Spirit, however, we produce something far different: “But the *fruit of the Spirit* is love, joy, peace, long-suffering [or patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (verses 22-23). That is truly *good fruit*! God wants us to bear *much* of this fruit!

Spirit-led people have these wonderful virtues of godly character as the result of God’s Spirit acting from within. The credit for this fruit belongs to God and Jesus Christ who supply that Spirit.

And God will let us bear this fruit only when we are trying to *give* of ourselves to others. This fruit is manifested in *relationships*. God’s Spirit is like a river (John 7:38). It will flow *into* us only when it is also flowing *out* to others.

In a series of future articles we will examine each of the special aspects of the fruit of the Holy Spirit listed in Galatians 5—to thoroughly understand them, to see how we can cultivate them and to see how we can use them in serving God and one another. We will get a good taste of each one.

As we do that, let’s remember to focus on Christ’s overall lesson regarding the fruit of our lives: *Bear good fruit and much fruit!* **GN**

# The Parable of the Sower

In Jesus’ parable of the sower, recorded in Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8, “the seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). The story describes three reasons why some who hear God’s truth fail to bear spiritual fruit. It also reveals the state of mind of those who produce abundant fruit. Following is a paraphrased summary of the four examples given.

The seed that fell by the wayside and was eaten by birds illustrates how many people may hear some truth, but Satan the devil is responsible for their losing interest before they really study it, believe it and act on it.

The seed that fell on rocky soil illustrates how some people are initially enthusiastic about God’s truth, but they don’t put down deep spiritual roots. When they begin to suffer trials or persecutions because of their beliefs, they lack the faith and courage to continue, and so they wither like a thirsty plant in the sun.

The seed that fell among weeds and thorns illustrates how our lives can become overcrowded and spiritually starved, just like a plant surrounded by weeds becomes starved for sunlight, water and nutrients. Those weeds and thorns include “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches [materialism],” “the desires for other things” and “cares, riches and pleasures of life” (Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14).

“But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matthew 13:23). Or, as Luke records, “those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience [or endurance]” (Luke 8:15).

Which of the above examples will apply to your life?







# God's Spirit: The Power to Transform Your Life

*Jesus Christ is cultivating supernatural "fruit" in the lives of His disciples. To understand that miraculous effect, we must first understand the awesome cause and ultimate source—the Spirit of God.*

by Don Hooser

**P**eople want power! Car power and computer power. Political, economic and military power. Physical and mental powers. And *spiritual* power.

Tragically, however, most people search for help in the wrong places. Some believe they have an inner psychic power they can uncover and unleash. Others are convinced there is a mysterious "universal energy" they can align with or tap into. Some even turn to outright spiritism.

Many people put their hopes in one of the countless false religions, either non-Christian or counterfeit Christian. They may choose an ancient "ism" or some New Age philosophy. A cafeteria approach is also common, where a person picks ideas from several religions to create a combination he likes.

## The awesome power of God's Holy Spirit

What mankind most needs is *spiritual* power from our Creator God—the force He offers that can govern our lives, solve our problems and lead us to real peace. It is the fuel of spiritual transformation. And most importantly, for those who receive that Spirit, "If he plants in the field of the Spirit, from the Spirit he will gather the harvest of eternal life" (Galatians 6:8, Today's English Version).

It's exciting to understand the reality of the Holy Spirit and how God uses it! But *what exactly* is it?

First of all, it is *not* something we are born with. It can only be received as a divine *gift* from God after one believes the truth of the Bible, repents of his sins and is baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38-44).

Secondly, contrary to popular tradition, the Bible reveals that the Holy Spirit is not a third person in a Trinity. (In fact, the word "trinity" is never mentioned in the Bible. It is hardly mentioned in historical records until about *three centuries* after the writing of the Bible was finished!)

In reality, the Bible shows that the Holy Spirit is the *nature* and *essence* of God the Father and



**In the Bible, God's Spirit is compared with water, rivers, oil, a cloud and fire. These comparisons would not make sense if the Holy Spirit were a person.**

His Son Jesus Christ. In fact, "God *is* Spirit" and the source of the Holy Spirit (John 4:24, emphasis added throughout). "The Spirit," "the Spirit of God" and "the Spirit of Christ" are used synonymously in Romans 8:9.

In the Bible, God's Spirit is compared with water (that one is "baptized with"), rivers (that "flow"), oil (that is "poured out"), a cloud (that "filled" the temple) and fire (that one can "quench" or "stir up" to rekindle). These comparisons would not make sense were the Holy Spirit a person.

God's Spirit emanates from Him and radiates everywhere, which explains the *omnipresence* of God—how God can, in effect, be present *everywhere* at all times. As David wrote: "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?" (Psalm 139:7).


God's "broadcasting" by His Spirit has been easier to understand since the invention of radio and television. We can enjoy sights and sounds in our own homes as much as if we were in the faraway TV studio. We can get perfect "reception" from God no matter where we are.

God uses His Spirit as His "remote control." When "God created the heavens and the earth," He used the power of "the Spirit of God" (Genesis 1:1-2). After praising God's creation, the psalmist wrote, "You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth" (Psalm 104:30).

Ever since creation, God has used His Spirit to sustain and maintain the universe—everything from the largest galaxies to the smallest subatomic particles. All creation functions perfectly according to the laws of nature—which God put in force and keeps in force.

God not only disseminates knowledge by His Spirit, but His Spirit brings Him awareness of all things. "You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off . . . For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether" (Psalm 139:2-4). Thus, by His Spirit God is *omniscient*, which means He has total knowledge!

And God is *omnipotent*—having universal and unlimited power! He is *El Shaddai*—God Almighty. Therefore, "with God, all things are



possible” (Mark 10:27), whether it is parting the Red Sea, changing water to wine, healing the sick or resurrecting the dead. With every miracle, God is using the infinite power of His Spirit.

Perhaps the most far-reaching miracle was the incarnation of God when the Father sent His Spirit to impregnate a young virgin named Mary (Matthew 1:18, 20). That was Jesus Christ’s first coming. The next great highlight in His story will be His second coming!

### The greatest ongoing miracle

That brings us to the world’s greatest challenge—the transformation of human nature! This spiritual conversion is taking place in the people God has called and who are submitting and committing their lives to Him.

Compared to instantaneous miracles, it is a slow process because God has given human beings free will—freedom of choice. Like a master potter with his clay, God patiently forms His nature in us as we yield to Him.

The big challenge is the rebellious nature of man! Jesus Christ cited the evils that come “out of the heart of men” (Mark 7:20-23). Paul related the corruption in people’s character when they turn their backs on God (Romans 1:24-32). Later he explained how humanity’s evils “will grow worse and worse” in the end time (2 Timothy 3:1-7, 13).

Paul also called the ugly traits of human nature “the works of the flesh.” He concluded his list by saying “those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21).

Like noxious weeds in a vineyard, sins must be eradicated. “*Put to death*, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5, New International Version). God’s Spirit is the power that liberates us from being “slaves of sin” (Romans 6:16-18).

God pinpointed the problem of all mankind when He said, “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments” (Deuteronomy 5:29). Everyone has spiritual heart trouble, and everyone needs a spiritual heart transplant!

Through His prophet Ezekiel, God said: “Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions

which you have committed, and *get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit*” (Ezekiel 18:30-31).

A later prophecy for all mankind states, “I will give you *a new heart and put a new spirit within you*; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh”—a heart that is soft, pliable and receptive (Ezekiel 36:26).

The indwelling of God’s Spirit is the very thing that *defines* a true Christian, a son of God. You are “in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you” (Romans 8:9). And “as many as are *led* by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God” (8:14).

It is by following the lead of God’s Spirit and relying on its power that one’s life can be spiritually transformed!

And it is the Holy Spirit that empowers the Church to carry out Christ’s work here on earth in preparing the way for His return (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8).

### The promised “fruit of the Spirit”

If you missed it, we recommend you read the previous article in this series—“Jesus Christ’s Command to Us: Bear Good Fruit and Much Fruit.” It explains and amplifies what Christ said in John 15:1-16.

Just as a fruit grower demands more than pretty leaves, God will not be pleased if we are merely religious and nice. He wants *productive* servants who are growing spiritually and at the same time serving God and their fellow man with every opportunity.

Keep in mind that we human beings “can do nothing” that is spiritually good on our own (John 15:5). That’s why we need God’s Spirit to guide and enable us!

Each of us was created to be “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16). That is why Paul could say, “Christ lives in me” and “we have the mind of Christ” (Galatians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 2:16). And when Christ lives in you, He *changes* you. His work is a complete remodeling job, to make your character a replica of His own.

Another analogy is that God’s Spirit carries the code of God’s “DNA,” as it were. When you receive an infusion of His Spirit, it brings with it the righteous spiritual attributes that enable and empower you to develop the fruit of God’s character.

God’s Spirit is necessary to comprehend the spiritual truths of the Bible (1 Corinthians 2:7-16). Knowledge of God’s Word is essential to spiritual growth. The Bible and

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# God’s Greatest Gifts

In the beginning, God created mankind “in His own image” with wonderful bodies and minds; He also created everything else on earth for man’s benefit (Genesis 1:26-30).

Then He gave the most precious thing He had: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

And Christ was willing to sacrifice His life. “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us” (1 John 3:16).

Because of Christ’s sacrifice, we can receive God’s amazing grace, which includes the forgiveness of all our sins. “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

And what gift does God give then? It is His “gift of the Holy Spirit,” which one receives immediately after baptism when his or her sins are forgiven (Acts 2:38).

Just think: God is offering to implant His very own nature and power within you! What an astonishing offer! And then that gift results in the wonderful “fruit of the Spirit” and “gifts” of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Corinthians 12:4).

And finally, it is God’s Spirit dwelling in you that makes possible the ultimate gift—“the gift of God is eternal life” (Romans 6:23), sharing God’s nature and divine glory in His Kingdom forever (2 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Timothy 2:10; Hebrews 2:10; 1 Peter 1:4; 5:10).

Our response to God’s grace and generosity should be overflowing gratitude and heartfelt submission to His will!

God’s master plan for mankind and how you can become a part of it are explained in our free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

Please reflect on the story of the Ethiopian official in Acts 8:26-39 and his eager desire for baptism and the gift of God’s Spirit. He earnestly asked, “What hinders me from being baptized?” (verse 36).

What hinders you?





# Love: The Ground From Which Spiritual Fruit Springs

*When God's Spirit is at work in a person, amazing things happen. The person's whole life blossoms and bears beautiful fruit. And the most wonderful fruit of all is the giving and receiving of true love.*

by Don Hooser

People long to love and be loved. Consider the countless love stories, songs and poems that have been written! Romanticists sing the praises of love, as in the song “Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing!” It seems the world is in love with love.

The word *love* can mean many things, as can be seen from the numerous dictionary definitions. We also find many kinds of love in the Bible.

*Love* usually refers to strong *feelings*, and feelings are important. God wants us to *really feel love* for Him and for other people. But we will see that God also wants us to experience a *greater love* that transcends human emotions.

Many people go through life receiving very little human love. However, God's plan is for every person to eventually experience His love flowing *to* him and *through* him—so fully that each can honestly say, “My cup runneth over with love.”

Ironically, when people are desperately trying to understand the “mystery of love,” they seldom read the greatest book ever written about relationships, the Holy Bible. If you study it for yourself, you will learn far more about love than we can cover in this introduction to the subject. This brief look is meant to help you get started.

## The greatest love and examples of love

Many of the examples of human love in the Bible didn't involve any special help from God. Even without His help, people can have a grateful type of love and appreciation for their Creator.

But the Bible also reveals how we can experience love for God and love for people that far exceeds mere human capability! This highest and purest form of love is God's divine and sublime love that He offers to share with us!

In fact, love summarizes and epitomizes the ultimate nature of God. “He who does not love does not know God, for *God is love*” (1 John 4:8, emphasis added throughout). We can learn about love from Love

Himself. God wants to transform us so that *our* character is also defined by love.

First, consider God's decision to create human beings. He *didn't need* us. And God knew what to expect initially from His wayward creatures—mostly grief. But because of God's desire to share everything with others, He is creating “sons and daughters” for His expanding family (2 Corinthians 6:18).

Even before creation, God the Father and the One who became Jesus Christ knew that to transform human beings spiritually and bring them into the Kingdom of God, Christ would have to sacrifice His life for humanity's sins (Hebrews 10:12; Revelation 13:8).

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). That greatest-ever demonstration of love was the ultimate sacrifice God the Father and Jesus Christ made for each of us.

## What was “new” about the love Jesus Christ taught?

The two “great commandments” Jesus emphasized were not new. Contrary to what many people think, the Old Testament is full of teachings about love. But Jesus Christ taught a whole new level of love and set a never-before-seen example of love! Let's see what was new about it.

A man well-versed in scriptural law, trying to test Jesus, asked Him which was “*the great [most important] commandment in the law*” (Matthew 22:36). Jesus answered, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (verse 37).



Spiritual fruit doesn't emerge from nothing. It springs forth from a rich, fertile, nourishing source—from the kind of outgoing concern for others that the Bible defines as true love.

This is the answer the lawyer probably expected, since Jesus was quoting from Deuteronomy 6:4-9, a passage known as the *Shema* (after the first Hebrew word in it), which had become the Jewish confession of faith, recited twice daily by the pious.

But Jesus then went beyond what was specifically asked, saying, “And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:39). This was *not* a *new* commandment, since Jesus was quoting Leviticus 19:18.

But it seems the Jews had not coupled it with Deuteronomy 6:5 as another “great” commandment. Therefore, the first thing

we notice is that Jesus raised “love your neighbor” to a much higher level of importance.

Jesus also expanded the concept of “who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). He told the parable of the good Samaritan, which shows that God wants us to regard everyone as a “neighbor” we would gladly assist in any way we could. We are to be *neighborly* to all, regardless of race, nationality or social class (verses 30-37).

Nowhere does the Old Testament say, “Hate your enemy,” but that had become the traditional thinking by Jesus’ day (Matthew 5:43). Jesus then shocked everyone by saying the opposite: “But I say to you, *love* your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (verse 44). This was a “hard saying” and revolutionary, as it is completely contrary to human nature.

When the Bible speaks of love, note that love has more to do with what we *do* than what we *think or feel*. For example, consider the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12), usually paraphrased as: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” *Works* are more important than *words*, although what we say is an extremely important part of how we treat people (James 2:22-26).

Interestingly, this emphasis on action and commitment is indicated by Jesus’ choice of Greek words. Usually Jesus used the most general word for love—*agape* as a noun or *agapao* as a verb—which implies thought-out decisions and determined effort to show love. Occasionally He used *phileo*, which implies affectionate feelings.

Understanding how the word *hate* is often used in the Bible helps us to understand the meaning of *love*. Both usually emphasize action. Treating someone badly is equated

with hate and treating someone well is equated with love.

Therefore, when Jesus said, “Love one another,” He meant for us to show love even when it is not natural or easy—even when the other person is not appreciative or responding. When Paul wrote, “Husbands, love your wives” (Ephesians 5:25), he meant that we should treat our wives lovingly all the time, even when we don’t feel like it. And generally, the more we *show* love, the more we will *feel* love.

### Christ’s perfect example of love

Jesus said, “A *new* command I give you: Love one another” (John 13:34, New International Version). What was “new” about it? The second half of the verse explains: “*As I have loved you*, so you must love one another.”

Jesus’ teachings about love set the highest standards ever (Luke 6:27-38). And He backed them up with His perfect example, showing a love greater than the world had ever seen!

First, consider how Christ was willing—for the sake of mankind—to sacrifice His heavenly glory and power to be incarnated as a mere human being (Philippians 2:5-11).

Second, He continually “went about doing good” for everyone as a humble servant—teaching, encouraging, healing the sick, comforting the oppressed (Acts 10:38; Matthew 8:1-17). He “did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matthew 20:28).

Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). Jesus laid down His time and energy continually, and then laid down His very life for His beloved. He was willing to go through the most terrible suffering and then death—for each and every one of us.

So we see from Christ’s teachings and example that godly love is deep *outgoing concern for* and *generous giving to* others. And it is a continual willingness to be *self-sacrificing* so we can assist others. It is the opposite of selfishness and self-centeredness.

### Learn to love as God loves

We can learn how to love God and to love others by following the Bible’s examples, teachings and *laws*. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

God showed His love to us by giving us His perfect laws. We show our love for God by obeying those laws. The first four of the Ten Commandments tell us how to love God and the last six tell us how to love our fellow man.

Other biblical laws give us further details on how to apply the Ten Commandments. To understand all this and why the author of Psalm 119 exclaimed, “Oh, how I love Your law!” (verse 97), request or download our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*.

We can also learn godly love by being in fellowship with other believers in God’s Church. True Christians are to love all people, plus they are to have a special love for each other. We “ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:14-18).

Jesus made it clear that the main way we show our love for God is by acts of mercy and service to His other children. Jesus said, “Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40; compare 1 John 4:20-21).

The original Christians were wonderful examples of ideal brotherly love (Acts 2:41-47; 4:31-37). Jesus said that “love for one another” was to be the primary distinguishing feature of His disciples (John 13:35).

## The Bible’s “Love Chapter”

One Bible chapter—1 Corinthians 13—is aptly known as the *love chapter* since it gives us a beautiful description of what godly love is like!

The rest of this letter from the apostle Paul shows that some Corinthian church members sought certain spiritual gifts with a wrong motive—to gain superior status. In 1 Corinthians 12:31 (NIV), Paul said, “And now I will show you *the most excellent way*”—the right motive and approach for exercising all spiritual gifts—the way of love.

In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Paul mentions several impressive gifts. No matter which gift we have, if we are lacking love, then in God’s sight we are nothing! Without love, the gift is tarnished, the results are ineffectual and God is displeased. Verse 3 shows that even self-sacrificing, charitable works can be done with motives other than true love.

Verses 4 through 7 tell us some of the characteristics of true love: Love is not selfish or self-centered. It is kind, humble, forgiving, courteous, not easily angered, respectful, trusting, positive and hopeful. It also gives us spiritual resilience and patience so that it willingly “endures all things” to obey and serve God.

Envy and competition create division, as was the case in the Corinthian church. Love is the great unifier.

Verse 11 points out that emotional and spiritual maturity is best summed up by love.

We may tend to rank faith and hope alongside love, “but the greatest of these is love” (verse 13).

As the New Living Translation says in 1 Corinthians 14:1, “Let love be your highest goal”!



## The fruit of God's Spirit is love

Our human efforts alone can never produce godly love. But the good news is this: People can have the *divine-type love* toward God and toward other people if—if—they have the indwelling of God's Spirit.

The apostle Paul referred to it as “the love that comes from the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:30, Contemporary English Version). He said God's Spirit is the Spirit “of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

To the Galatians he wrote, as we are exploring in this article series, that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [patient endurance], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). *Love tops the list* because it is first in importance! It also encompasses all the other aspects of the fruit of the Spirit.

The previous article in this series explains God's Holy Spirit. The key scripture on how to attain God's Spirit is Acts 2:38, which says, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission [forgiveness] of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

For those of us who have received God's Spirit, “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:5, NIV). We begin with a little love, but God helps us to keep growing until we have a lot of love. In fact the previous verses outline the step-by-step growth process made possible by God's

love and Spirit (verses 1-5).

By His Spirit, God offers us a continual supply of His limitless love. He continually fills our wells so that we have plenty to give to other thirsty people. An analogy Christ used is that His love is like a river that comes from the great Source and will flow through us (John 7:38).

God will keep His love flowing *into* us as long as it keeps flowing *out from* us. It must flow *back* to God—a grateful, reciprocal, responsive love for God—and it must flow *out* in love and service to other people. The more you give it away, the more you will have. And the more you love others, the more you will be loved.

### Loving in a world of hate

When Paul wrote to the Galatians, he was alarmed that bad influences were causing them to lose their love for one another (Galatians 5:13-6:10). They were exhibiting more “works of the flesh” than the “fruit of the Spirit.” Today, the influences toward hatred and selfishness are even worse.

Paul wrote that “in the last days, perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves . . . without natural affection . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God . . .” (2 Timothy 3:1-4, King James Version).

And Jesus, foretelling conditions in the end time, said that “because lawlessness will

abound, the love of many will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12).

All around us we see indifference, resentment, anger, abuse and even cruelty. There is more loneliness and heartbreak in the world than real love.

But the return of Jesus Christ will bring about the fulfillment of this prophecy of Ezekiel 36:26: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh”—that is, a soft, yielding heart instead of a hard, stubborn heart.

In the meantime, we can swim upstream against the world's influence. With God's Spirit, each of us can be a light of love in the midst of the darkness.

### God initiates—let us respond

All true love comes ultimately from God: “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). God takes the lead in establishing the relationship.

God's calling is like a marriage proposal. It is up to us to respond by humbly submitting and committing to Him. If we do, God will love us forever and will forever fill us with His love.

When God's people are “led by the Spirit of God,” that Spirit produces wonderful and abundant “fruit to God” (Romans 8:14; 7:4).

And of all the aspects of the fruit of the Spirit, the loveliest is—*love*. **GN**

## Holy Spirit

*Continued from page 6*

the Holy Spirit are synergistic—each is much more effectual because of the other. In a sense, the Bible guides us from *without* while the Holy Spirit guides from *within*.

God literally *in-spires* our understanding when He puts His *Spirit in* us. Without God's Spirit, people can understand only *pieces* of spiritual truth, like seeing pieces of a jigsaw puzzle but not being able to visualize the overall picture.

In addition, God's Spirit imparts desire, motivation, willpower, zeal and strength to put that spiritual understanding into practice. God promised, “I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts” (Hebrews 8:10). When that new nature is internalized, they, like the author of Psalm 119, begin to *love God's laws* (verse 97).

Indeed, God's Spirit profoundly changes people! Paul wrote that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). In this series of articles, we will thoroughly examine each of these aspects to understand them and learn how to practice them in our daily lives.

Note here that although “fruit” is singular, God has *many* characteristics that all harmonize to form His holy character. John summarized God's character with one word: “God is *love*” (1 John 4:8). But just as we can distinguish the individual colors of the rainbow when white light passes through a prism, it is profitable for us to examine each attribute of God's character.

### Fruit production requires patient perseverance

After a believer has been baptized, he receives the gift of God's Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). New disciples of Jesus Christ begin as spiritual children, but God expects them to rapidly grow up to become mature Christians (Ephesians 4:11-16). To do that, we all need to keep spiritually fed with the daily nourishment of prayer, reading the Bible and meditat-

ing on it, and striving to live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4).

After someone has received the gift of God's Spirit, why does he not produce abundant fruit immediately? Think of a healthy fruit tree in early spring. The tree is receiving plenty of sunshine and water, and the sap is flowing. And there may already be the tiny emergence of fruit. But the fruit is not desirable until it has grown to full size and ripened to sweet maturity.

Likewise, a new disciple of Jesus Christ has immense potential, but he starts out with fruit that is small and “green” or immature. If we are ever to bear ripe luscious fruit, we must assist the Owner of the orchard with our own horticulture—our own fruit cultivation—day after day for the rest of our lives.

James put it very well in James 5:7-8: “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” **GN**



# Joy: Foundation for a Positive Life

Jesus said to His disciples, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). That sounds almost too good to be true!

How can we experience this fullness of joy?

by Don Hooser

**W**ouldn't you like to experience deep and enduring joy? Wouldn't you like to be *joy-full*? Please be assured—you *can*.

The world has a woeful shortage of joy and a surplus of fear, worry, discouragement and depression. Even the “pursuit of happiness” and obsessive pleasure-seeking do not bring deep and lasting joy.

Let's first understand the difference between *joy* and *happiness*. Happiness is an emotion, and God never intended for people to be in that emotional state all the time. There is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance” (Ecclesiastes 3:4).

Biblical joy—the true joy—comes from filling the spiritual void with good relationships, primarily an intimate relationship with the One who is pure joy. Jesus put it this way: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit” (John 15:5). That fruit includes *much joy!*

The Bible speaks much more often of joy than of being happy. “Hap” means *chance* and is the root of several words—*happen*, *happening*, *haphazard* (dependent on mere chance), *hapless*, *happenstance* (a chance circumstance) and *happy*.

Happiness is a glad feeling that depends on something good *happening*. God wants you to experience happy times (as long as God approves of what is happening). But His greater desire is that you have unconditional joy. Jesus said His joy would “*remain in you*” and “*your joy no one will take from you*” (John 15:11; 16:22, emphasis added throughout).

Think of joy as a strong foundation that supports a variety of healthy emotions, including happiness. The long-range evidence of joy is general gratitude, contentment, optimism, a sense of freedom and other positive attitudes.

## Joy looks out and up, not inward

A common mistake is to think that *getting* something will make you happy. We tell

ourselves, “*If only . . .*” But joy and happiness come much more from *giving* and *servicing* than from *getting*.

The apostle Paul reminded his listeners that Jesus Christ had taught this very thing: “There is more happiness in *giving* than in receiving” (Acts 20:35, Today's English Version).

To grow in joy, we must resist not only self-pity but also being self-centered and self-absorbed. For joy to flourish, we must focus on loving others and especially on loving God.

Joy is largely composed of *gratitude*—gratitude for the wonderful things God *has done* for us and His “exceedingly great and precious *promises*” for our future (2 Peter 1:4). Gratitude produces joy (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). And our gratitude should be for other people's blessings as well as for our own (Romans 12:15).

Try to follow this biblical formula: Add to your life gratitude, humility, forgiveness, faith, hope, patience and love. Take away resentment, anger, fear, worry, materialism, greed, jealousy, complaining and pride. The result? Joy!

## Joy is spiritual, supernatural and essential

God is joyful—far more than any human being ever was! It's tragic that many people think of God as somber and stern rather than cheerful and smiling with a great sense of humor. He is enjoying His creation, and especially the delightful anticipation of many new “sons of God” (Romans 8:14, 19).

True followers (imitators) of God will be joyful also. Psalm 68:3 says, “Let the righteous be glad; . . . let them rejoice exceedingly.” God desires that we serve Him “with



Joy is largely composed of gratitude—gratitude for the wonderful things God has done for us and His “exceedingly great and precious promises” for our future.

joy and gladness of heart” (Deuteronomy 28:47).

Paul spoke of the “joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 1:6). It is through His Spirit that God shares and communicates His joy.

And when Paul lists the “fruit of the Spirit,” joy is *second*, preceded only by love (Galatians 5:22-23). If we are filled with godly love, won't that produce joy? Of course it will.

Being second in the list surprises many people who mistakenly think joy is spiritually unimportant. Some religious people even *shun* joy, at least subconsciously, thinking that pious people should instead



be *solemn*. A few even choose asceticism, which God abhors.

Joy is a major topic in the Bible. In the King James Version, “joy” appears 158 times and “rejoice” 198 times (not counting other variations such as *joyful, joyfully, joyous, jubilant, happy and glad*).

*Rejoice* is the verb form of joy, meaning to feel or have *joy!* Clearly there is great emphasis in the Bible on *feeling and expressing joy*. That explains why the Bible also emphasizes prayers and songs that praise (celebrate) God (James 5:13; Colossians 3:16-17).

Joy is not optional. The Bible repeatedly *commands* us to rejoice! The most emphatic exhortation is in Philippians 4:4, where Paul says, “*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*”

### Is it wrong to have sorrow?

The Bible describes two kinds of sorrow. “For *godly sorrow* produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but *the sorrow of the world* produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Those who have joy frequently experience godly sorrow at the same time. It can be the sorrow of repentance toward God. Those who feel the worst about their sins feel the greatest joy about their forgiveness and God’s amazing grace.

Another example is *mourning* over the suffering of others while having the joy of knowing that God will eventually solve all problems (Matthew 5:4).

Worldly sorrow is generally self-pity or a victim mentality. While one indulges in worldly sorrow, it’s virtually impossible to have either godly sorrow or joy.

Isaiah’s prophecy said Jesus would be “a Man of sorrows”—sorrows over mankind’s sins and suffering (Isaiah 53:3). Yet He was also prophesied to be “anointed . . . with the

oil of gladness more than [His] companions” (Hebrews 1:8-9; Psalm 45:6-7). And indeed, Christ had great joy and also experienced great sorrow (John 17:13; Matthew 26:37-39).

Grieving is a healthy response when a loved one dies. However, if we believe the truth of the resurrection, we also have comfort and joy because we know our loss is only temporary. The grief is much more painful for those “who have no hope” in a resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

### Joy because of trials?

God’s joy continues to flow through His people even during their suffering because of their rock-solid hope. They know that all suffering is limited to this short life, and the time will soon come when “there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying” (Revelation 21:4). They “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:2).

We also have good reason to rejoice *because of* our trials when we understand how God is using those trials to help us build godly character. “And we know that all things [even severe trials] work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

More specifically, Paul wrote that “we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:3-4, New International Version).

James wrote, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance”—perseverance in remaining faithful to God (James 1:2, NIV).

And because Christ suffered for each of us, we should have a special joy when we are

persecuted for our faith. Jesus said, “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:11-12).

### The number one key to joy: God’s Spirit

Supreme joy is God’s nature and character! We see proof everywhere in God’s creation—birds singing, animals leaping, flowers blooming, brooks babbling and the sun shining! Many people would be less depressed if they would spend more time outside. God “gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17).

Since God is exceedingly joyful, His servants should also be joyful! Sadly, many who claim to be His disciples are austere, sour and dour. But take note of Luke’s description of true disciples: “And the disciples were *filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 13:52).

How can we be filled with joy and the Holy Spirit? “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission [forgiveness] of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38).

What then? Our unique joy begins because Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20). He tells us to “rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). We then have an intimate relationship with the One Psalm 43:4 calls “God my exceeding joy.” In His presence “is fullness of joy” (Psalm 16:11).

God’s Spirit is a tree of life, producing life-giving fruit (Galatians 5:22-23). That fruit includes great joy.

Jesus prayed for His followers “that they may have *My joy* fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13).

He also teaches us to pray for joy and for all our needs. As He tells us in John 16:24, “Ask, and you will receive, *that your joy may be full!*” **GN**

## Paul’s Example of Joy—Even in Persecution and Prison!

**J**oy comes not from what happens *to* us, but *how we respond*—the kind of attitudes we have *about* those experiences. We need not feel like helpless victims of circumstance.

No matter what predicament we are in, we should ask ourselves: How does God want me to *view* it and *feel* about it? Then we can *choose*—with His help—to have that frame of mind.

A good illustration of this is the apostle Paul’s life. If anyone in history could be excused for wallowing in self-pity and thinking “woe is me” because of frequent severe hardships, it would be Paul (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

Before God called him, Paul was hard-hearted and angry, persecuting and executing Christians. But after his conversion, he was transformed into a loving and joyous person—partly because he understood the magnificent generosity of God’s grace and mercy.

Ironically, of all the books of the Bible, among the most joyful are the “prison epistles”—letters written by Paul while enduring an imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:16-31). They are the books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. A man whom we would expect to *need* encouragement was *giving* encouragement!

Paul referred to his intense suffering as “light affliction” compared with the “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” that awaits God’s servants at the resurrection (2 Corinthians 4:17; see also Romans 8:18). What a great attitude!

Paul wrote, “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (Philippians 4:11). Contentment is a large part of joy.

Paul didn’t tell us to rejoice only when the going is pleasant and easy. He said, “Rejoice always” (1 Thessalonians 5:16).



# Peace: The Hunger of Human Hearts

*The apostle Paul, locked in a depressing prison cell, wrote, “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.” He reminded his readers that they also could have “God’s peace, which is far beyond human understanding.” You too can have this unique contentment and peace!*

by Don Hooser

**P**ease. Ah, the word itself stirs calming and pleasant thoughts.

Hearts yearn for peace. In fact, a common greeting in many languages is to wish someone peace, like *shalom* (Hebrew) or *aloha* (Hawaiian). Even Jesus Christ used it (John 20:19, 21, 26).

How about your life? Are you stressed out with life’s pressures and wanting more peace? Most people would say *yes!*

The Bible focuses on three areas of peace: personal peace of mind, doing what we can to have peace in our relationships with others and eventual peace among all nations.

True peace of mind is an inner calm, contentment and confidence no matter what the outer circumstances. This seems impossible, but “with God all things are possible” (Mark 10:27).

## A planet without peace

We live in a frightening and frenzied world. We used to hear of someone being a *nervous wreck* or suffering a *nervous breakdown*. Emotions haven’t changed as much as terminology. *Tension*, *anxiety*, *depression* and *panic attacks* are the common designations today.

One result is the overuse and abuse of alcohol and legal drugs as well as the use of illegal drugs—as people turn to temporary escapism instead of seeking long-term solutions.

Finding peace in a contentious world can seem hopeless, but Scripture tells us to “seek peace and pursue it” (1 Peter 3:11). Seek it by taking time to read the Bible, by far the greatest book on peace ever written (Colossians 3:15-16). Pursue it through prayer to the very “God of peace” (Hebrews 13:20).

Christ’s followers are protected from many trials and dangers, but not all. In fact, some trials, like persecution, happen *because of trying* to “live godly in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:12).

The key is to rely on Christ, the source of sublime peace (John 14:27; 16:33) and the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). He can “guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79).



## Finding peace in a contentious and difficult world seems hopeless, but Scripture tells us to “seek peace and pursue it.”

### Practical principles and spiritual dangers

To experience peace, you must take responsibility for your thoughts (Philippians 4:8). With God’s help you can quit *reacting* with anger or self-pity. It’s not your circumstances or other people that determine your mood; it is your *attitude* about them. “Whoever has no *rule over his own spirit* is like a city broken down, without walls” (Proverbs 25:28, emphasis added throughout).

Today, many good books and Web sites have practical advice on reducing physical and mental stress. Some keys are to learn good interpersonal skills, be positive and flexible, exercise, get good nutrition and sleep, learn to relax, and rest one day each week.

However, don’t trust everything that is written. New Age teachings, based on pagan ideas with new scientific-sounding terminology, have mushroomed in popularity. As people have pushed the Bible out of their lives, they have been filling the spiritual vacuum with a dangerous counterfeit spirituality.

Learning and living by the Bible brings more mental and emotional benefits than any

New Age teaching. Furthermore, instead of being drawn into the paganism of false gods, one is drawing close to the true Creator God who *inspired* the Bible.

### Fear and worry versus faith, courage and peace

For most people, the most common type of meditation—thinking intently on a particular subject—is *fear* or *worry!*

But guess what single command in the Bible occurs more often than any other? *Fear not.*

But how is that possible? We must replace fear with *faith*—a childlike trust in your heavenly Father. “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he *trusts in You*” (Isaiah 26:3).

The Hebrew expression translated “perfect peace” here is literally “peace, peace.” It refers to the *superior* kind of peace that *God* makes possible for human beings. And those who have this peace are hoping for *ultimate divine* peace in the resurrection!

Trust in God to be your shelter and shade, your refuge and fortress (Psalm 61:4; 121:5; 91:2). David wrote, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,



I will fear no evil, for You are *with me*" (Psalm 23:4).

Worry is a type of fear, and Jesus repeatedly said, "Do not worry" (Matthew 6:25-34). Worry is a waste of time and energy. The Creator provides for *all* His creatures, and "you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:31).

We cannot experience true faith and peace without obedience to God. His perfect commandments define the way of peace. God said, "Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea" (Isaiah 48:18).

The issue of fear is not primarily about emotion. "Fear not" means to have the *courage to do the right thing* even when it seems frightening. Knowing "the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" will give you the needed "good courage" to go forward anyway (Joshua 1:9).

### The greatest key to peace: God's Spirit

True peace of mind depends on attaining "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

Begin by humbly turning control over to God. Trying to manage our lives on our own generally brings only frustration and confusion, yet "God is not the author of confusion but of peace" (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Do as Peter instructed: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission [forgiveness] of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

These two great gifts of God—forgiveness and the Holy Spirit—result in "righteousness and peace and joy" (Romans 14:17). Even better, they lead to the greatest gift of all—eternal life (Romans 6:23). The "hope of eternal life" takes away the "fear of death" (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 2:15). No other comfort compares!

In Galatians 5:22-23, the apostle Paul is apparently likening the Holy Spirit to a tree of life. He said, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, *peace*, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

Consider carefully the relationship of peace to all the other virtues that come through the Spirit. Each helps produce and maintain all the others.

Consider also the contrast between the fruit of the Spirit and the "works of the flesh"—human nature—in verses 19-21, including "hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like." God's Spirit will *replace* these vices!

### "Grace and peace"

Why do Paul's epistles begin with variations of the salutation, "*Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ*"? (See, for example, Galatians 1:3.)

Paul may have coined a new phrase or perhaps adopted a previously little-used phrase. "Grace" (Greek *charis*) or "Grace to you" was a Greek greeting.

On the other hand, "Peace" (Hebrew *shalom*) was a Jewish greeting.

Paul ministered to Jewish and Greek Christians, so the greeting "Grace to you and

peace" was inclusive and unifying. "You are *all one* in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

More importantly, the New Testament adds great theological meaning to "grace" and "peace."

*Grace* includes God's wonderful gift of forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7). Grace heals the guilt! It is the great *prerequisite* to peace. First pardon, then peace.

God's grace also makes us "sons of God" (Galatians 3:26). What peace to know we are the beloved of our gracious Father!

Therefore the distinctly Christian greeting gave honor to the One who gives us grace and, as a result, real peace.

### Enjoy peace and be peacemakers

Peace and harmony come to those who extend it to others. Paul wrote, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). We are called to be peacemakers, following the example of the supreme Peacemaker (Matthew 5:9).

Pray that God will make it possible for His people to "lead a quiet and peaceable life" (1 Timothy 2:2). Pray for peace of mind. Pray for peaceful relationships. And pray for God's peaceful Kingdom to come soon!

Paul's admonition in Philippians 4:6-7 (Revised Standard Version) beautifully summarizes this wonderful subject: "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. *And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" **GN**

## World Peace—Will It Ever Come?

**P**ace—worldwide permanent peace among all nations and peoples—has been a perpetual hope and dream of mankind. It's the stuff of countless stories, sermons and songs—and wishful thinking.

Endless strategies have been proposed and tried. Think of all the peace demonstrations, peace talks and peace treaties! But leaders are too often people "who speak peace to their neighbors, but evil is in their hearts" (Psalm 28:3). They're deviously manipulating to get a *bigger piece* of the world. Sadly, even sincere negotiations are often fruitless.

God inspired Isaiah to write a poignant portrayal of world history: "They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly [margin: *superficially*], saying 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14). The Contemporary English Version paraphrases this as, "All they ever offer to my deeply wounded people are empty hopes for peace."

Man on his own cannot discover lasting solutions. "The way of peace they have not known" (Isaiah 59:8). They are spiritually blind (verse 10).

The conduct of nations reflects the behavior of people. International relations will be peaceable only when all *people* are peaceable. And Scripture promises that this will eventually come to pass.

World peace will require people to have "a new heart and a new spirit"

(Ezekiel 18:31). Only God can give us that new heart and spirit. For the people God is calling now, He is offering that change. When Christ returns, that offer will be extended to all people.

During Christ's first coming, He was not trying to bring about peace on earth (Matthew 10:34). But world peace will begin when the Prince of Peace returns to earth. Then "of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:7).

Christ's peacemaking will *not* be by *appeasement*, which is the granting of concessions to enemies in hopes of buying them off. Rather, He will forcibly put down rebellion and establish His Kingdom on earth. Then He will set about reeducating all mankind and bringing about their spiritual conversion.

At that time, the nations will be led to "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4).

That is when "everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:4).

Someday we *will* finally see true peace on earth. This is a central aspect of the message Jesus and His apostles preached—the message Paul referred to in Ephesians 6:15 as the "gospel [or good news] of peace."



# Longsuffering: A Fusion of Patience and Power

*The popular impatiens flowers are so named from seeming to be highly impatient! When their seed pods mature, they explode when touched, sending seeds several yards away. See how this picture illustrates the need for longsuffering, an important fruit of God's Spirit!*

by Don Hooser

**L**ongsuffering is no longer an everyday word, but it is a virtue needed more than ever when impatience, intolerance, oversensitivity and impulsive anger are so prevalent.

Anger and animosity can be the result of many negative influences. The evil influence we *all* are infected with is our own selfish nature. And our human abilities to make major improvements are pitifully weak.

We need God's help!

In Galatians 5:19-21, the apostle Paul refers to our human nature as "the flesh" and our selfish tendencies as the "works of the flesh." These include "hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders"!

Clearly we need the antidote for these traits, which is God's Spirit!

Paul went on to say, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, *longsuffering*, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23, emphasis added throughout). What an amazing contrast!

All these beautiful virtues work together and support each other. Think about how longsuffering relates to the other attributes.

## Two important words

Listed fourth among the fruit of the Spirit is a wonderful quality translated "*longsuffering*" in some Bible versions and "*patience*" in others.

Those two English words are closely related, both associated with *endurance*. More important and fascinating is learning about the two corresponding Greek words in the New Testament.

One Greek word—*humpomonee*—is translated "patience" in almost all Bible versions and implies *patient endurance*.

The other Greek word is even more interesting. It is *makrothumia*, translated

"patience" in some Bible versions but *more accurately* as "longsuffering" in others.

The Greek word *makro* (which gives us the English prefix *macro*) means "large" or "long." The root word *thumos* means "temper." Therefore *makrothumia* literally means *long-tempered*, the opposite of *short-tempered* or *having a short fuse*.

Without *makrothumia*, we human beings tend to be *temperamental*—having an irritable temperament and bad temper. We tend to "lose patience" and "lose our cool" and even "blow up" (like an impatiens plant).

We'll focus primarily on *makrothumia* since it is the word used in Galatians 5:22. However, please keep in mind how these two words overlap in meaning and are both important to our spiritual understanding and growth.

## Longsuffering and love vs. anger and hate

Longsuffering is virtually the opposite of anger, especially of "outbursts of wrath" (2 Corinthians 12:20).

When a traffic light turns green, some drivers will impatiently honk their horns if the car ahead doesn't start moving within *two seconds!* No longsuffering there! Even worse is the epidemic of road rage with cursing and actual violence.

Many people tend to *overreact*. They quickly get on the defensive, interpret remarks as attacks and then strike back. Many people carry a lot of inner anger from their past. Every small hurt or annoyance adds to the storehouse of anger. The slightest provocation brings the anger to the



**Impatiens are popular and beautiful flowers. They get their unusual name from a characteristic that makes them seem highly impatient.**

Anger usually involves a spiteful attitude of retaliation and revenge. But God forbids this: "Bless those who persecute you . . . Repay no one evil for evil . . . do not avenge yourselves" (Romans 12:14, 17, 19). The Bible teaches mercy and forgiveness.

People tend to excuse their anger, but most human anger is self-centered and sinful. "The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:20).

Hardly anyone will admit to hating people. But the Bible defines love and hatred largely by people's actions. *Love* is expressed through *helping* people, while



*hate* is demonstrated through *harming* people (see Romans 13:10).

Paul described the behavior of love: “Love *suffers long* and is kind . . . [It] does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). The New International Version renders his words this way: “Love is *patient*, love is kind . . . It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is *not easily angered*, it keeps no record of wrongs.”

Our thoughts and attitudes are likewise important, as they are the source of our actions and words: “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

Therefore we should honestly examine our attitudes. Each of us should ask: Am I motivated by love, respect, patience and compassion, or am I motivated by resentment, contempt, intolerance and hardness of heart?

### Slow to anger, quick to forgive

“The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, *slow to anger* and great in mercy” (Psalm 145:8). That’s the way He expects us to be!

Consider carefully these wise words about being “long-tempered”: “He who is *slow to wrath* has great understanding, but he who is *impulsive* exalts folly” (Proverbs 14:29). “A wrathful man *stirs up strife*, but he who is *slow to anger* allays contention” (Proverbs 15:18). “The discretion of a man makes him *slow to anger*, and his glory is to *overlook a transgression*” (Proverbs 19:11).

James wrote, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, *slow to wrath*” (James 1:19). Then if and when appropriate anger is expressed, it will likely be under control.

You have probably heard the good advice of “stop and count to 10” and “take some deep breaths” rather than lashing out with words you’ll regret—words that will escalate conflict rather than make peace.

Truly the first step of longsuffering is to exercise restraint and *do nothing*. We must *think first! What does God want me to say or do?*

If your feelings are hurt and you feel the need to immediately say something, speak softly and don’t say anything to hurt back. “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

Then take as much time as you need to pray and plan regarding the wise and constructive way to approach the other person. Your goal is to *act lovingly* rather than *reacting hatefully*.

When a person is too concerned about winning an argument, he can end up losing a friend. Don’t be too concerned about *who is right* or demanding your *rights*. Learn to be *agreeable* even when you *disagree*. Pray for God’s help with this.

### Solution to impatience, short tempers

Even without God’s help, people can learn to be calm and patient much of the time because they see the advantages.

But these good intentions and good habits are not nearly as powerful as God’s supernatural gift of longsuffering. Good interpersonal relationships depend on you doing your best *plus* trusting God with the rest. We human beings are pitifully incomplete without God’s Spirit.

How does one *obtain* the Holy Spirit? The apostle Peter briefly explained in Acts 2:38, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

To truly be “sons of God” we must be “led by the Spirit of God” (Romans 8:14).

In Colossians 3:12-13, Paul describes the nature of someone who is led by God’s Spirit: “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, *longsuffering*; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you

also must do.” (He states something very similar in Ephesians 4:1-3.)

Notice how these qualities tie together and give us an expanded view of longsuffering. We need to patiently “bear with one another” rather than allow ourselves to get irritated!

### Longsuffering and eternal life

*Waiting for others* is a test of our patience and an opportunity to *build* patience. And the Bible has much to say about our need to wait on God. We want God to solve all our problems *right now*, but God knows the best timing. He often tests our patience and perseverance before answering our prayers.

When the Bible mentions waiting, patience, perseverance or longsuffering, it is often in connection with trusting in God to intervene for us in our need, as He assuredly will: “But *those who wait on the LORD* shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

This patient waiting is ultimately focused on the second coming of Jesus Christ: “To those who eagerly *wait for Him* He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Hebrews 9:28).

Only those who remain faithful to death or to Christ’s coming will be rewarded in His Kingdom. After warning about end-time persecution of Christians, Jesus said, “But *he who endures to the end* will be saved” (Matthew 10:22).

“Endures” means continuing to be led by God’s Spirit and continuing to bear the fruit of His Spirit to the end of your life or the second coming of Christ, whichever comes first.

As James 5:7-8 exhorts us: “Therefore be patient [literally, *longsuffering*], brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” **GN**

## The Longsuffering of God

“**B**ut You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, *longsuffering* and abundant in mercy and truth” (Psalm 86:15).

God’s longsuffering toward His human creatures means two things. He patiently continues to provide for us and serve us even while He suffers from our sins and stupidity. And God doesn’t “lose His temper.” Our very existence depends on God not reacting too quickly or overreacting!

Why is God longsuffering? He is generously giving us more time as He patiently waits for us to repent of our sins! “Or do you despise the

riches of His goodness, forbearance, and *longsuffering*, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4).

Likewise, Jesus Christ is longsuffering toward us for the same reason: “The Lord . . . is *longsuffering* toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance . . . And consider that the *longsuffering* of our Lord is salvation” (2 Peter 3:9, 15).

Jesus Christ, our Savior, suffered and died for us. Ever since then, He has patiently and mercifully worked to save us and give us eternal life!

Therefore our attitude should be Christlike—respecting, loving and being patient with all people. We should hope for their good and pray for their spiritual growth and salvation!



# Kindness: From the Heart to the Helping Hand

*God's nature is that of incredible loving-kindness toward all people. And He will kindly help His followers cultivate the much-needed fruit of godly kindness.*

by Don Hooser

**T**ake a look at what, according to Scripture, accompanies true kindness: “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each another, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:31-32, New International Version).

To consistently live up to all this is humanly impossible! But “with God, all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

How important is kindness? In a 2003 study of 37 cultures around the world, 16,000 subjects were asked about their most desired traits in a mate. For both sexes, the first preference was *kindness!*

People want to be *treated* kindly but have a harder time *being* kind themselves. A large-scale study of school bullies was recently conducted to learn why they bully other kids. The conclusion? Most do it because they *enjoy* doing it.

This illustrates how cruel, mean and sadistic raw human nature is. Kindness must be *learned*, and many children are not being taught it.

In fact, much of the media they're exposed to teaches the opposite. Violence and other terrible influences in media entertainment cause people to become desensitized and calloused toward the needs and feelings of others.

Some people think kindness is weak—not something for “go-getters” to be bothered with. *Big* mistake! If we want God, who has ultimate control of how things go in the universe, to be kind to us, we'd better be kind to others. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7).

People have many excuses: “I'm too busy.” “The person deserves his suffering.” “God is probably punishing him” (like Job's friends assumed wrongly in the book of Job). But God doesn't accept excuses for failing to show kindness.

Lack of kindness is epidemic. The

apostle Paul accurately foretold a cold and hard-hearted world “in the last days” (2 Timothy 3:1-3). As a result, people are starved for the milk of human kindness!

## What is kindness?

Kindness starts with *caring*—being tenderhearted and compassionate toward others. If God wants us to be kind to animals, how much more to people! (See Proverbs 12:10).

Next, we must make it our goal and habit to be actively looking for opportunities to show kindness. When we see one, we need to act quickly before the opportunity is gone.

The Greek word for “kind” is *chrestos*. Part of its meaning is *useful*, which makes it clear that biblical kindness involves *action*. “Dear children, let us stop just saying we love each other; *let us really show it by our actions*” (1 John 3:18, New Living Translation, emphasis added throughout).

Action includes some kind of *self-sacrifice* and therefore *generosity* on our part, especially of our time. (That doesn't mean we neglect sufficient rest and whatever is needed to refill our own well.)

Of course, the emphasis on deeds over mere words does not mean words are unnecessary. Action *includes words*. Encouraging words of comfort, courtesy, compliments and even correction can be heartwarming acts of kindness. Several biblical proverbs attest to this.

What to say and not say should be guided by awareness of the sensitivities of others. We must help people *heal* from their emotional wounds rather than rubbing salt in those wounds. Sadly, when people know what “buttons to push,” they often use that insight to further hurt each other.

Our motive for “charitable deeds” should not be to impress people (Matthew 6:1-4). The greatest rewards from God come when our acts of kindness are done humbly,

quietly and, when practical, anonymously.

Doing someone a favor to get a favor in return is not wrong unless it's illegal or unethical (like bribery). But a favor done to get some benefit is not true kindness. Genuine kindness is lending a helping hand when you expect nothing in return.

Kindness should begin with our kin. Ironically and tragically, many people display their most unkind behavior with the ones they should love the most. God is not unaware of this hypocrisy.

And Jesus Christ emphasized that we must be kind to *everyone*, not just our family and friends (Luke 6:31-34). If you do this, “your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to [even] the unthankful and evil” (verse 35).

## Be kind to the unthankful? Ouch!

If you and I are kind to hundreds of nice people, doesn't that prove we are kind people? Perhaps yes, according to normal standards. But God's standard requires being kind to *all*—even “evil” people.

Now if we do a good deed for someone and there is no “thank you,” don't we feel we should “give him what he deserves” and wash our hands of him?

Of course. But our reacting in this “natural” way is not sufficient if we want to be “sons of the Most High.” We must ask, “What would Jesus do?” and then do likewise.

Some people have not been taught to be thankful and are blind to the sin of ingratitude. It's good to remember a line from Glen Campbell's 1970 song, “Try a Little Kindness”: “And if you try a little kindness, then you'll overlook the blindness.”

A huge factor in the world today is that many people are psychologically confused, wounded and scarred by being neglected, rejected or abused, especially during the vulnerable time of childhood. They can be full of depression, fears, anger and suspicion.



And people who have *not* been abused themselves may well have absorbed attitudes passed along from those who *have* been abused.

If you reach your hand out to pet a dog, will he wag his tail or bite you? If he has been repeatedly beaten and abused, he may interpret your gesture as a threat and bite.

Likewise, many people are suspicious of any favors. They assume everyone has a selfish ulterior motive and is out to manipulate them or hurt them. They often “bite the hand that feeds them.”

But these people need kindness more



## Kindness starts with caring—being tenderhearted and compassionate toward others.

than anyone! Persistent efforts to be kind to them can gradually convince them that you are a true friend. Furthermore, your kindness can bring about progressive healing for their wounded hearts.

### How to cultivate kindness

It takes genuine effort to be truly kind. In Galatians 5:19-21, the apostle Paul refers to human nature as “the flesh” and our natural tendencies as the “works of the flesh.” These include *hatred, jealousies, selfish ambitions* and *envy*. All these traits are selfish and self-centered.

Kindness requires the opposite—*caring concern* for others. “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem *others* better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also *for the interests of others*” (Philippians 2:3-4).

Our innate human nature must be replaced by *God’s* nature, and that can only happen by receiving the gift of God’s Spirit dwelling in us and the wonderful fruit it produces: “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, *kindness*, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

Each characteristic here clearly relates to the others. Longsuffering, the previous one explained in this series of articles on the fruit of God’s Spirit, is linked with kindness in two other lists (2 Corinthians 6:6; Colossians 3:12). And both are important components of *love*: “Love suffers long and is *kind*” (1 Corinthians 13:4).

How does one obtain the Holy Spirit? The apostle Peter explained the basic requirements in Acts 2:38: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

### Follow the Bible’s examples of kindness

Great examples of kindness can inspire us to greater kindness: King David toward Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9). The Shunammite woman and her husband

toward Elisha (2 Kings 4:8-10). Dorcas, a beloved woman who “was full of good works and charitable deeds” (Acts 9:36-39). The Samaritan in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Barnabas, whose name meant “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36).

Another is the “virtuous wife” who diligently attends to the needs of her family and of many others (Proverbs 31). “She extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy” (verse 20). “And on her tongue is the law of kindness” (verse 26).

May our tongues be guided by the law of kindness!

One of the most important Hebrew words in the Old Testament is *hesed*, used there 240 times. It is often translated *mercy*, but the meaning is broader—concerning *loyal or steadfast love* and *covenant faithfulness*. No single English word is adequate to translate it, partly because language is insufficient to describe this central quality of God’s character. The word *devotion* perhaps comes closest. But the demonstration of this committed love in actions is also included. That’s why the word is sometimes appropriately rendered as *mercy*, as mentioned, and as *loving-kindness* or just *kindness*.

The Scriptures frequently praise the *hesed* of God. They also tell us that we should have *hesed* toward one another.

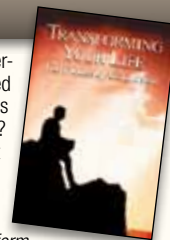
Jesus Christ practiced kindness that was radical for that time and culture. He always had great concern for women as well as men, for children as well as adults, for other races as well as the Jewish race, and for the sick and weak as well as the strong. Often He wore Himself out praying for people, healing people, feeding people and helping them in other ways.

When Jesus looked on the multitudes of people with all their problems, sicknesses and confusion, He was “moved with compassion” (Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 18:27). As we look at the people around us, we, too, should be *moved with compassion*. We, too, should be helping, giving, sharing, caring, encouraging, extending mercy, filled with compassion and acting on it as we are able—in a word, *kind*.

With each of us, may the fruit of kindness continue to blossom and grow. Above all, may we strive to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, who personified God’s *hesed* in the greatest example of loving-kindness. **GN**

### To Learn More...

How can you develop the wonderful fruit of the Spirit as described in this article series? What does it mean to be led by the Spirit? How can you have that Spirit at work in your life? You need to understand! To discover the answers, request or download your free copy of *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. This free booklet explains the little-understood truth revealed in your Bible!



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# Goodness: God's Character and Man's Potential

*The spiritual fruit of goodness enables sinful man to do good and to be good—good in the truest sense of the word. Goodness, after all, is the essence of God's nature.*

by Don Hooser

**A**re you suffering an internal spiritual war? If so, that's a good sign. It's a sign that you are pursuing goodness, which causes the badness of human nature to fight back.

Yes, according to the Bible, badness comes naturally (Romans 8:7). Goodness does not. But God has a wondrous plan to radically transform our character!

Though our natural inclination is to defy God in sin, He has determined to help us overcome that nature to live a life of righteousness and goodness. This is possible only through a relationship with Him. As the apostle John explained, "He who does good [as a way of life] is of God, but he who does evil [as a way of life] has not seen God [i.e., has not come to really know Him]" (3 John 11).

John also explained that those who truly are of God have God living in them through the Holy Spirit: "By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit" (1 John 4:13).

Paul explained to believers that God's perfect, loving character is "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:5, New Revised Standard Version).

We can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit through faith, repentance, water baptism and the laying on of hands by God's servants (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:14-17).

Once God's Spirit is at work within us, it produces the wonderful fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, *goodness*, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). These virtues blend together to reflect the overall character of God!

## Goodness: part of God's nature

In the Bible, the "goodness" of God often refers to His gracious generosity in providing abundantly for mankind's needs

and benefits (Psalms 23:6; 65:11). It can also refer to God's generous mercy and patience that allow more time for sinners to repent (Romans 2:4).

But God's goodness is much more than those things. It is *the very essence of God's nature*—His righteousness and holiness. In Ephesians 5:9, we see that His goodness is closely associated with *righteousness* and *truth*.

To the extent that we have God's goodness, we have godliness or God-likeness.

The Bible gives us God's complete "instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). We should cherish it and read it far more than any other book or resource! Only through it can we learn to be like God.

God summarizes His standards of goodness in the Ten Commandments. Psalm 119:172 tells us that "all Your commandments are [or define] *righteousness*." God intends that they be our guideposts for life.

Let us now focus on how biblical goodness describes what one *does* and what one *is*.

## We must be doing good

Jesus wants His disciples to "bear much fruit" (John 15:8). Being fruitful requires *action*—knowing the right thing to do and then *doing* it. As James wrote, "*Be doers of the word*" (James 1:22). Simply abstaining from evil and *doing nothing* is not good enough.

Jesus "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). We should too! "Through love, *serve one another*," we are told (Galatians 5:13). Jesus' parable of the sheep and goats shows that God knows how much we love Him by how much we are showing self-sacrificing love for other people (Matthew 25:31-46).

Good works include *obeying* God's laws. God gives His Holy Spirit "to those

who obey Him" (Acts 5:32). That doesn't mean salvation can be *earned* by obedience. We are saved by God's grace, which "is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). However, we are being "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (verse 10).

He who loves God will gladly demonstrate that love for God by keeping His commandments (1 John 5:3; 2 John 6)!

It takes courage to obey God, because it often brings persecution: "But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently," God will greatly bless you (1 Peter 2:20; compare Matthew 5:10).

Christ said to *do good to everyone*, even our *enemies*! "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you" (Luke 6:27-28).

Later He said, "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same" (verses 32-33).

Doing good to someone who does good to you, Jesus points out, is not pure goodness. It is rather two people exchanging favors, which can be at least partly selfish. God's standard is the very highest!

Here is an inspiring passage to remember: "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us *do good to all*, especially to those who are of the household of faith [fellow believers]" (Galatians 6:9-10).

## Our heart should match our actions

God is just as concerned about our *heart* as He is our actions. James wrote to the early Christians, "Cleanse your hands [actions], you sinners; and purify



your hearts [attitudes], you double-minded [straddling the fence between God and the world]" (James 4:8).

Double-mindedness can mean duplicity and hypocrisy. Jesus hated hypocrisy, which is a false front and being more concerned about looking good to others than in getting rid of the evil within us (Matthew 23:25-28). Remember, we never fool God.

"Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good" (Romans 12:9).

To keep a clean mind, guard it carefully! Don't look at or listen to anything

seen by others is part of being "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14-16).

### Our spiritual warfare

Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia (Galatians 1:1-2) because he had been shocked and grieved to hear how many church members had become deceived and led astray by spiritual enemies. One enemy then and now is "this present evil age"—the wicked influences in the culture around us (verses 3-5). It calls "evil good, and good, evil" (Isaiah 5:20).

The evil is great because "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked

nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, 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" (Galatians 5:19-21, New International Version).

Pretty nasty looking list, isn't it? There is only one force that can defeat human nature—the power of God's Spirit and the fruit it produces (verses 22-23).

Although the key to success is the power of God's Spirit, we have our part to do. Paul said, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (verse 16, see also verse 25). While you have access to God's Spirit, *stay with it, use it, walk, go forward!* Walking with God includes, of course, regular *talk* with God in *prayer*.

In verse 17, Paul describes the spiritual warfare that erupts whenever a person is trying to follow the lead of God's Spirit: "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" (NIV). To further understand this, you can read about Paul's personal struggles in Romans 7.

Take note of the ultimate goal of this spiritual war: "*bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

It will be a positive sign when you begin to experience this inner warfare. It will mean you are trying to come out of sin, somewhat like Moses and the Israelites trying to leave Egypt. Remember how Pharaoh stubbornly tried his best to oppose them, to keep them enslaved? Well, that was a type of how Satan, the world and your human nature will try to defeat you. Don't let them!

In Paul's letter to the church at Rome, he wrote, "Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are *full of goodness*" (Romans 15:14). May you likewise pursue spiritual growth so that one day it will be said of you: *You are full of goodness.*

People speak of a life of comfort and affluence as "the good life." But living a life close to God with all the great benefits He offers is the *truly good life!* Allow God to cultivate in you the good fruit of goodness. And that will lead to the gift of *eternal life!* *That's as good as it gets!* **GN**



## God knows how much we love Him by how much we are showing self-sacrificing love for other people.

immoral or anything that compromises your conscience. Even *little* sins are spiritual poison that contaminate, infect and spread like cancer (James 1:14-15; 2 Timothy 2:17; Galatians 5:9). One sin leads to another.

Pure hearts require right *motives*. Paul said that if he did good works without *love*, "it profits me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). Doing good deeds to impress others will bring no reward from God (Matthew 6:1-4). But when the motive is to "glorify your Father in heaven" instead of yourself, doing good works that are

one," Satan the devil (1 John 5:19). That's why we need the spiritual defenses Paul referred to as "the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:10-20).

Spiritual enemies also include false teachers (Galatians 1:6-9; 3:1). We must be extremely cautious about whom we listen to.

Usually, however, our biggest enemy is *ourselves*. Paul often warned about "the flesh," meaning the selfish, destructive and downward pull of our human nature.

For example, he stated: "The acts [tendencies and temptations] of the sinful



# Faith and Faithfulness: Fundamental to Relationships and Responsibilities

*Do you trust God completely? So much so that you live accordingly—to the point that He is able to trust you? When Jesus Christ returns, wouldn't it be wonderful to hear Him say approvingly, "Well done, good and faithful servant"?*

by Don Hooser

**"**Old Faithful" is a famous geyser in Wyoming's Yellowstone National Park. It was so named in 1870 because it reliably erupts at somewhat consistent and predictable intervals.

A famous Latin motto, *Semper fidelis*, means "Always faithful." *God* is always faithful, and we should learn to take Him at His word. Do we? And how much can you and I be counted on to be faithful?

"Many a man claims to have unflinching love, but a faithful man who can find?" (Proverbs 20:6, New International Version). It is increasingly difficult to find someone whose love or loyalty can be counted on. So many people are fickle and faithless.

It's sad to read the apostle Paul's prophecy of wretched attitudes and habits "in the last days" (2 Timothy 3:1): "For men will be lovers of themselves . . . blasphemers . . . unloving . . . slanderers . . . traitors . . ." (verses 2-4). The consequences to society are disastrous.

Marriages and families are a major casualty. Fewer and fewer people are willing to make lifelong commitments. And a great many who do make wedding vows (even "before God") later on break those vows in one way or another. When someone cheats on or deserts his or her mate, God says "you have dealt treacherously [with] . . . your companion . . . by covenant" (Malachi 2:14-16). God hates these forms of unfaithfulness.

All good relationships are built on the foundation of faith and faithfulness—of mutual trust born out of trustworthiness. A good marriage is largely defined as a faithful wife and faithful husband. A good friend is a *true* friend or a *faithful* friend—not a "fair-weather friend," but one who "loves at all times" (Proverbs 17:17, emphasis added throughout). A good employee is a *trusted* and *dependable* employee.

Although all people sometimes fail at faithfulness, we can always count on God. That is what enables us to have complete faith and trust in Him. It's vital that we respond to the faithfulness of God the Father and Jesus Christ with deep and abiding faith, so that we will then give Them our very best—our utmost allegiance, fidelity, obedience and devotion.

## Produced through the Holy Spirit

God's standard of faith and faithfulness is far greater than what we can achieve with our own human effort. To reach the level of faith to truly become faithful like God we must wholeheartedly *seek His help!* *Pray* for faith and faithfulness. *Read the Bible* to learn about and come to trust in God's faithfulness (Romans 10:17)—and to be inspired to follow His example just as others of His servants have in times past. Seek the fellowship of "the church of God" where others are trying to faithfully follow God still today (Acts 2:42; 20:28).

And to truly "hold fast" spiritually, we must have *God's Spirit* dwelling within us (2 Timothy 1:13-14).

How do we obtain God's Spirit? Right after the apostle Peter preached a powerful sermon, he told the listeners, "*Repent*, and let every one of you *be baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission [forgiveness] of sins; *and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:38).

God's Spirit then imparts the nature of God, which develops in us gradually, like fruit ripening on a tree.

The "fruit" that God's Spirit produces is composed of many wonderful virtues. The apostle Paul listed some of the main ones. The New King James Version of the Bible presents his words this way: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, *faithfulness*, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Rather than "faithfulness," the earlier

King James Version has the word "faith" here. This is consistent with the way the Greek word *pistis* in this passage is usually translated elsewhere in the New Testament—including numerous occurrences in the book of Galatians. Yet most modern Bible translations have "faithfulness" or a like term here.

One reason for this is that faith, our belief and trust in God, is normally seen to come from ourselves—and not as a product of God's Spirit within us. And it's true that faith toward God comes with repentance—before receiving the Holy Spirit. Yet faith is elsewhere referred to as a gift of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9).

The book of Galatians itself says that we must have and live by "the faith of Christ" (Galatians 2:16, 20, KJV). Revelation 14:12 says that God's true servants "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

How do we reconcile this? The answer involves different degrees of faith. Our initial faith toward God does come prior to receiving His Holy Spirit, though even this is in response to what God shows us in life and the help He gives us to believe. But upon receiving the Holy Spirit, God the Father and Jesus Christ come to dwell within a believer, changing one's character from the inside. This includes greatly increasing the person's faith.

With this much deeper faith, a person will be led to totally trust God with regard to the blessings for obeying His law and the consequences for disobeying. This will lead to obedience from the heart and always returning in repentance to God upon falling short. This is *living* faith—*saving* faith. It comes through the Holy Spirit. (To better understand, request or download our free booklet *You Can Have Living Faith*.)

All this being so, it may not matter so much whether the word here is rendered "faith" or "faithfulness." For if we have liv-



ing faith, we will respond with faithfulness. Living faith itself is a product of God's Holy Spirit—as is the faithfulness that results.

Indeed, God's Spirit is the only power great enough to help us overcome the evil "works of the flesh"—our selfish human nature (Galatians 5:19-21). The results of this selfishness are gross examples of



## Fewer people are willing to make lifelong commitments. And a great many who do make wedding vows later on break those vows.

*unfaithfulness*, including adultery (infidelity to one's spouse), fornication (infidelity to one's future spouse), idolatry and sorcery (infidelity and treason against God), and murders (total betrayal of another). May God help us to be different!

### Faithful in all things, big and small

Let's look now at some important lessons on faithfulness from Scripture. These show how God judges our character.

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much" (Luke 16:10, NIV). God never overlooks or excuses *any* irresponsibility. We must prove our trustworthiness in even the smallest duties.

"So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" (verse 11, NIV). God judges our character by how we manage *everything!*

"And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?" (verse 12, NIV). We should be just as careful—or even more careful—with the property of *others* as with our own. That kind of trustworthy stewardship brings certain rewards in this life and will bring much greater rewards in the next life.

The next passage is about slaves or bond-servants, but we can and should apply these principles to the role of an employee or helper:

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from

the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism" (Colossians 3:22-25, NIV).

"Masters" (employers, supervisors, etc.) are just as accountable to God for how they treat those working under them (Colossians 4:1; Ephesians 6:9).

### Faithfulness includes perseverance

Perseverance is a key to success in everything, including running a race. When Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, he was in prison awaiting almost certain execution. But he was at peace because he knew he had been faithful to God.

Paul wrote, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). May we have this same confidence at the end of our race!

The ultimate reward for perseverance is *eternal life!* Jesus said, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life"

(Revelation 2:10). We must never give up or fall away!

In Matthew 24, Christ was giving His disciples startling prophecies of the "end of the age" (verse 3). In verses 9 through 12, He speaks of tribulation and persecution. Then in verse 13 He says, "But he who *endures to the end* shall be saved."

In much of this chapter, Jesus is speaking of His second coming—at a time when most people will not be expecting it! It is the "faithful and wise servant" who will be richly rewarded—the one who, motivated by faith, has continued to do God's will and God's work until he dies or Christ returns, whichever comes first! (Matthew 24:44-46; see also Revelation 22:12).

### Faithfulness to God and Christ

What *is* God's will and God's work? Part of the answer is in the next chapter. It includes giving food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, hospitality and clothing to those who need them, and care for those who are sick or in prison (Matthew 25:31-46).

The returning Christ is portrayed as the King who will say, "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (verse 40). We show our love for God and Christ by how we love God's other children (1 John 4:20-21). Let's *do it!*

Also in Matthew 25, in verses 14-30, Jesus told the parable of the talents (a "talent" was a measure of money). This story illustrates several vital lessons.

God gives each of us different abilities and opportunities, and He expects us to thoroughly use them in His service. He will generously reward us according to how much we have spiritually grown and served in this life. An "unprofitable servant" who has wasted his time and opportunities instead of obeying God is called "wicked and lazy" and will be punished. And God does not accept excuses—not even fear of failure.

But the main point of the parable is how it beautifully portrays Christ returning someday to reward His faithful followers—those who believe God and live accordingly.

To each of the profitable servants, the master said, "*Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord*" (Matthew 25:21, 23).

May we all live according to the faith God's Spirit develops within us—thereby exhibiting the faithfulness He desires. And in the end, may each of us hear Christ's wonderful approval on the great day He returns to reward His faithful servants! **GN**



# Meekness and Gentleness: Strength With a Tender Touch

*The biblical qualities of meekness and gentleness are misunderstood and undervalued in today's society of extremes—where all too often people tend to angrily overreact or passively underreact.*

by Don Hooser

**E**lephants are so strong they have frequently been used for logging—to carry large logs and even uproot trees. But these giants are usually gentle, especially when tamed from a young age.

The elephant's trunk in particular is an example of strength coupled with precise control. Its trunk, with more than 40,000 individual muscles, is strong enough to rip branches from trees but sensitive enough to pick up a single blade of grass!

The trained elephant illustrates the great value of having both strength and careful gentleness—unlike the proverbial “bull in a china shop.”

Compared to English, the Greek language has more precise words for describing the valuable quality of trained animals like elephants and horses. The New Testament uses those same Greek words for a virtue God wants His people to develop.

When the apostle Paul lists “meekness” as the eighth attribute among the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:23 (King James Version), he uses the Greek noun *praotes* or *prautes*—and “meekness” is the closest translation for the Greek word used here. (Similarly, the closest English translation for the related Greek adjective *praos* or *praus* is “meek.”)

We are to be meek (*yielded, teachable, responsive*) first of all in our relationship with God, and secondly meek (*humble, gentle, respectful*) in our relationships with people. To become this kind of person, God must tame and train us!

A word with a closely-related meaning is *magnanimous*, defined as “generous in forgiving; avoiding resentment or revenge; unselfish.”

Meekness is an important part of true love. “Love is patient, love is kind . . . It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5, New International Version).

The Bible places great value on meekness. Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek [Greek

*praus*], for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). That's a mighty big reward for being meek!

But since “meek” is no longer a popular or commonly used word, modern Bible translations frequently substitute the almost-synonymous word “gentle.” Scriptures quoted in this article are mostly from the New King James Version, which uses “meek” and “gentle” interchangeably.

However, be aware that gentleness refers mostly to *actions*, whereas meekness refers to *attitude*—one's *whole state of mind* as well as actions. Meekness *produces* gentleness. This explains why meekness is one of the beatitudes—beautiful *attitudes* for which God promises blessings (Matthew 5:5).

## Meekness is not weakness!

Many people confuse “meek” with “weak.” It's regrettable that they rhyme because godly meekness *requires strength!*

For a physical comparison, if you were badly injured and needed someone to *gently* carry you, wouldn't you want someone who was *really strong*? You wouldn't want a person who might stumble or clumsily struggle with you!

Adding to the confusion is the idea that hair-trigger angry reactions are “normal.” As a result, some people assume that a person who doesn't retaliate tit for tat must be afraid or mousy. But true strength is shown by a secure individual who stays cool, thinks first and then responds in the way that will best help the other person. “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

Consider God! He is *all-powerful*, but He never misuses His power. He is the perfect Father who never overreacts, is gentle with His often-unruly children and always does what is best for us.

Consider also the example Jesus Christ set while on earth. Although He could call on divine power, He was approachable, sympathetic, kind and loving. He said, “Take My

yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am *gentle* and lowly [humble] in heart” (Matthew 11:29, emphasis added throughout). He used His power for healing rather than hurting. Remember His words: “*Learn from Me.*”

## Fruit of the Holy Spirit

The greatest power on earth is the power of the Holy Spirit. It is this Spirit—God's Spirit—that enables people to be far more meek and gentle than they could ever be without it, as Paul shows in his letter to the churches of Galatia.

Paul knew that the Christians there were backsliding into hostile attitudes and personal conflicts. He wrote that some were “biting and devouring each other” (Galatians 5:15, NIV). He urged them to “through love *serve one another*” (verse 13), reminding them, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (verse 14).

What the Galatians needed was to “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16). And what did he say is the *result* of following the lead of God's Holy Spirit?

Paul went on to write of how that Spirit would transform our lives: “But the fruit [product, effect] of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, *gentleness*, self-control” (verses 22-23).

What a great solution! God doesn't leave us on our own to work up these virtues. By putting our faith in God, repenting of our sins and being baptized, we can “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). And that gift includes *wonderful fruit!*

Then, to continue bearing spiritual fruit, think of yourself as a branch. The key is to stay attached to the trunk of the true vine, Jesus Christ (John 15:1-6).

It's easy to see how the attributes among the fruit of the Spirit overlap and relate to each other. Meekness and gentleness relate very closely to love, longsuffering (being patient and not short-tempered), kindness and self-control.



It's also easy to see how desperately we human beings need God's Spirit to overcome the "works of the flesh"—the ugly and evil tendencies of human nature (Galatians 5:19-21). We surely need meekness and gentleness in place of "hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions"!

Later we see how important gentleness is when it comes to helping someone caught up in a sin. Paul said, "You who are spiritual restore such a one *in a spirit*



## The trained elephant illustrates the great value of having both strength and careful gentleness.

of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Paul not only meant we should show gentle words and actions, but *also a humble attitude* rather than a superior and self-righteous approach (see verse 3).

### To fight or not to fight?

Should a Christian be a fighter? A physical fighter, *no*. A spiritual fighter, *yes*.

Right after Paul wrote to Timothy to "pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness," he went on to say, "Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:11-12). This kind of fight is not against people but against evil influences, especially those of Satan and the demons (Ephesians 6:11-12). We are to use spiritual weapons, not physical weapons (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Successful spiritual warfare requires great courage and endurance. Paul wrote, "Watch, stand fast in the faith, *be brave, be strong*" (1 Corinthians 16:13).

But in our relationships with people, we are not to be combative or argumentative—we are to be *peacemakers*.

Paul also wrote: "Love one another with brotherly affection . . . Live in harmony with one another . . . Repay no one evil for evil . . . If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live *peaceably* with all" (Romans 12:10, 16-18, Revised Standard Version).

When someone hurts you, just take it rather than hurting back. That's what Jesus meant by loving everyone and turning the other cheek (Matthew 5:38-45).

Since we all like to be treated gently, why not treat everyone else gently? "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise" (Luke 6:31). That's the Golden Rule!

### Qualities that relate to meekness and gentleness

As with the fruit of the Spirit, other scriptures also show us how certain virtues go hand in hand. Paul said we are to "walk . . . with all lowliness and *gentleness*, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:1-2).

He also wrote that we should "put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, *meekness*, longsuffering, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do" (Colossians 3:12-13).

Meekness includes voluntarily "submitting to one another" (Ephesians 5:21). In a long passage, Peter spoke of the importance

of submission of all kinds—Christians toward government (1 Peter 2:13), servants toward masters (2:18), Christ's example of submitting to His tormentors (2:21-25) and wives toward their husbands (3:1).

Peter also encouraged wives to emphasize inner beauty rather than outer beauty—"the unfading beauty of a *gentle* and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:4, New International Version). Then in verse 7, he exhorted husbands to be *true gentlemen* and to *honor* their wives.

To everyone, Peter wrote, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with *gentleness* and respect" (1 Peter 3:15, NIV).

Two scriptures use another Greek word that specifically means "gentle." One says that "a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be *gentle [eepios]* to all, able to teach, patient" (2 Timothy 2:24).

And the other one beautifully shows Paul's great love for those in the churches he watched over: "But we were *gentle [eepios]* among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8).

The world sorely needs this kind of TLC—tender loving care!

### Grow in meekness and gentleness

To keep your attitudes and actions meek and gentle, you will need to swim upstream against the culture's current of rudeness and roughness. Paul foretold that "in the last days . . . men will be lovers of themselves . . . unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal" (2 Timothy 3:1-3). Doesn't that describe much of the content on television and in movies?

God is calling people out of such darkness to be "the light of the world"—to set the right example for others (Matthew 5:14). That's a tall order. But God is ever ready to help us. Pray earnestly for His help. And make a habit of reading God's Word so it can transform your thinking and way of life.

Remember that an important part of being that shining light is having godly meekness and gentleness. And someday the whole world will be a peaceful and happy place. That someday is when Christ returns and the meek inherit the earth! **GN**



# Self-Control: Governing Your Life by the Power of God

*In this series of articles on the fruit of the Spirit, we have come to the last of the nine virtues—self-control. Of all the things we have to govern in this life, self is often our greatest challenge!*

by Don Hooser

**T**he 21st Winter Olympics are scheduled for February 2010 in Vancouver, British Columbia. For most athletes hoping to compete, that date is now *extremely near!* They know that to be the best in any sport, they must train *for many years*.

The apostle Paul compared life to a race. He wrote: “Remember that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You also must *run* in such a way that you will *win*. All athletes practice strict *self-control*. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an *eternal* prize.

“So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step . . . I *discipline* my body like an athlete, *training* it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, New Living Translation, emphasis added throughout).

In the greatest of all races, the race for eternal life, *everyone* can be a *winner*. Thankfully, there is no need to compete with another person. In fact, we should be coaches and cheerleaders for one another! But Paul said “run in such a way”—as an Olympic athlete competing for a gold medal.

Those of us who want the “*eternal prize*” should ask ourselves some questions:

- Am I as dedicated and zealous as an Olympic athlete?
- Do I study the Holy Scriptures as much as any athlete studies how to perform well in his sport?
- Am I quick in seeking advice (through prayer and Bible study) from my Coach?
- Do I stay focused on my long-range goal?
- Am I willing to make sacrifices to reach my goal?
- Am I determined to *endure to the end*—to cross the finish line of life—and to *never quit*? (Matthew 24:13).

We probably can’t say *yes* to all those questions every day. *But we surely must be heading in that direction*. This

requires taking charge of our lives—the final listed aspect among “the fruit of the Spirit.”

## Self-control: last but not least

Paul listed nine godly virtues that constitute the fruit of God’s Spirit—the inward and outward effect of having the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. They are “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, *self-control*” (Galatians 5:22-23).

What a stark contrast they are to the actions of man’s sinful nature that Paul listed in the previous three verses!

(Where the New King James Version has “self-control,” the earlier King James Version used the word “temperance,” meaning self-restraint. Today, however, this word usually has the narrower sense of *moderation* or, when referring to alcoholic drinks, total *abstinence*. Therefore, as commonly understood today, temperance is only a small part of self-control.)

Is the sequential order of the nine godly virtues significant? The first listed, love, is clearly the most important (1 Corinthians 13:1-2, 13). Is self-control, then, last because it’s *least* important? On the contrary, self-control is extremely vital. Paul emphasized it alongside “righteousness . . . and the judgment to come” (Acts 24:25).

Perhaps self-control is listed last as the capstone—since it takes a lot of self-control *to exercise the other eight* virtues! It takes a lot of self-control just to “bridle” one’s *tongue* (James 1:26; 3:2). Maybe Paul was thinking of love and self-control as the two great bookends for the set.

Clearly these nine virtues work together and support each other. Consider *long-suffering*, which is the opposite of *short-tempered*. Many people are ruled by their *feelings* and can’t control their *anger*. In fact, one measure of maturity is *emotional control*. Some adults still have temper tantrums!

## The best form of self-control may be fleeing

We all face temptations to sin—all our lives. When confronted with temptation, we must strive, as far as possible, to get away from it—*flee!* Even if you think you have a lot of self-control, don’t put it to the test unnecessarily.

Consider some of the things we are told to flee: “Flee” from a “stranger” (a teacher of lies), “flee sexual immorality” (as Joseph had to literally flee, Genesis 39:12), “flee from idolatry,” flee “all kinds of evil,” “flee also youthful lusts” (John 10:5; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:14; 1 Timothy 6:10-11; 2 Timothy 2:22).

We need self-control to avoid not only outright evil but also *too much of the good things*. Proverbs 25:16 cautions: “Have you found honey? Eat only as much as you need, lest you be filled with it and vomit.”

People often lack the self-restraint to stop when they should. People overeat, overdrink, overspend and overindulge in lots of things. We must rule over our appetites rather than letting our appetites rule us. Overindulgence can lead to intoxication and/or addiction. In either case, the person is then really out of control!

Self-control often means resisting sexual temptations, a subject addressed many times in the Bible. Tragically, standards of morality and modesty are plunging around us. Sexual sins are especially damaging—physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually (1 Corinthians 6:13-20).

Because of lust, even smart people do stupid things. Just think of all the prominent people who’ve been caught cheating on their spouses! They may be “ruling” over *many* people, but they fail to rule their *own* lives. They trade integrity for instant gratification, and everyone loses.

Jesus and the apostles made it clear that God holds us strictly accountable for even sinful *thoughts* as well as sinful actions. We must wage spiritual warfare, “bringing *every thought into captivity* to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).



Jesus said, “Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed *adultery* with her *in his heart*” (Matthew 5:28). We should follow the example of Job, who said, “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl” (Job 31:1, New International Version).

And women need to understand how easily they can be partly responsible for men sinning in their minds. When a woman is exposing parts of her body that only her husband should see, others can be tantalized and tempted. Women who want to please God



**“Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control,” says Proverbs 25:28. He is defenseless and doomed to defeat.**

should “resolve this, not to put a stumbling block [a temptation] or a cause to fall [into sin] in our brother’s way” (Romans 14:13).

#### Is willpower powerful?

The Greek word translated “self-control,” *egkrateia*, is derived from two other Greek words—*en* and *kratos*. *En* means “in” and *kratos* means “strength” or “power.” From *kratos* we get such English words as

“democracy” (power or rule by the people) and “theocracy” (government by God).

From these Greek roots we see that *egkrateia* essentially means power or strength within. But *whose* power?

Even apart from God’s direct help, some people have relatively strong character. Their good habits may be the result of good upbringing plus wisdom gained from experience—perhaps combined with innate determination. But we shouldn’t confuse this with the erroneous New Age claim that everyone has a reservoir of righteous power deep within himself just waiting to be tapped.

Paul plainly said that “the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it *does not submit itself to God’s law*, for it is *unable to do so*” (Romans 8:7, Holman Christian Standard Bible). Thus, the normal human mind by itself is *not capable* of being in *complete submission to the law of God!* Therefore, we need “power within” that comes from God!

Jesus said, “The spirit [one’s attitude] indeed is willing but the flesh [human willpower] is weak” (Matthew 26:41). For example, 11 of Jesus’ disciples *intended* to stick by Him, but when things got really scary, they all deserted Him (verse 56).

Therefore, “self-control” can be somewhat misleading. Effective self-control is not ultimately *self* controlling *self*. To have truly effectual control over our lives, we need *God’s* power to be in control.

#### “Power from on high”

Just before Jesus’ ascension to heaven, He said to His disciples, “You shall *receive power* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). Luke 24:49 adds that the disciples were to wait in Jerusalem until they received this “power from on high.”

Indeed, 10 days later when 120 of Christ’s disciples were together observing the annual festival of Pentecost, suddenly “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” and God’s power was spectacularly demonstrated (Acts 2:1-4).

A vast crowd of people gathered about, and Peter explained to them what a person must do to receive God’s Spirit: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name

of Jesus Christ for the remission [forgiveness] of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

What are the benefits of having the Holy Spirit? There are many, but of crucial importance is that it enables *spiritual understanding*—the capacity to truly *understand the Bible* (1 Corinthians 2:9-11, 14).

Then, once we have spiritual “knowledge,” we must add “self-control” (2 Peter 1:5-8). In other words, God’s Spirit imparts the strength of character to *apply* and *live by* that knowledge. And as it *transforms* us, we can increasingly see the effects or “fruit” of having God’s Spirit within us.

#### The aim of discipline through discipleship

What is the purpose of parental discipline? It should be to teach a child to exercise *self-discipline*. The self-discipline gradually becomes a good habit that is valuable throughout life.

Jesus Christ wants you to be His *disciple*. He said, “If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples” (John 8:31, Good News Bible). Therefore discipleship includes learning the self-discipline of obedience. And that has great rewards! Choose to follow Christ—choose to be His disciple!

Jesus also said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). Jesus was not suggesting penance, asceticism or a monastic life. But very often, we need to say *no* to selfish desires in order to say *yes* to God’s will.

God will not take away a person’s free will to make choices in life. But as long as you keep inviting Him into your life, He will empower you “to will and to act according to His good purpose” (Philippians 2:13, NIV).

Two proverbs draw a stark contrast between not having self-control and the priceless value of having it. The first says, “Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control” (Proverbs 25:28, NIV). He is defenseless and doomed to defeat.

The second states: “It is better to be patient than powerful. It is better to win *control over yourself* than over whole cities” (Proverbs 16:32, GNB).

As with all of us, certainly your biggest spiritual enemy has been yourself. But take heart. With God’s great help, you can increasingly conquer the enemy!

Each of us must rule over self before we can, as promised to those who overcome in Revelation 3:21 and 20:6, reign with Christ in His Kingdom! **GN**



# A Crucial Factor in Producing Fruit: Eradicate the Weeds of Sin

*Victory requires understanding the enemy. In our spiritual warfare, the enemy is us! Raw human nature is like a field taken over by noxious weeds. We must eradicate the weeds and replace them with God's Spirit so we can produce much good fruit!*

by Don Hooser

If you have tried to maintain a vegetable garden, flower garden, lawn, cropland, pasture or park, you know about *weeds*. You didn't *plant* them—they just showed up!

Weeds have been a universal problem since Adam and Eve rebelled and God cursed the ground with “thorns and thistles” (Genesis 3:17-19). And there is a parallel problem. Just as soil left bare quickly becomes infested with weeds, mankind's spiritual nakedness has been dominated by noxious and obnoxious “weeds”—the many selfish and sinful traits of human nature.

Problems with “noxious weeds” (plants, shrubs and trees that are destructive, competitive and/or difficult to control) help us understand our sinful actions and attitudes. Weeds aggressively displace and crowd out desirable plants. Their roots rob neighboring plants of vital water and nutrients. Their foliage blocks out needed sunshine. Many are poisonous to wildlife and livestock. And weeds often spread invasively and rapidly.

A garden that is neglected will produce weeds rather than fruits and vegetables. Likewise, human nature has a tendency to produce weeds of evil rather than good fruit. And those weeds are a continuing threat to our spiritual survival!

So God's Word tells us to aggressively fight our human nature and to “*cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit*” (2 Corinthians 7:1, emphasis added throughout). In other words, God tells us to weed the garden!

But nature abhors a vacuum. We must replace bad habits with good habits or the bad habits will return, like weeds returning when soil is left bare. “Do not be overcome by evil, but *overcome evil with good*” (Romans 12:21). We must replace “sin leading to death” with “obedience leading to righteousness” (Romans 6:16).

## Replace sins of the flesh with fruit of the Spirit!

The sinful traits of human nature are what Paul called “the works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19, or “the acts of the sinful nature” in the New International Version). Like a farmer fighting weeds, we need to *make war* on *all* of them (verses 16-18).

Here is Paul's list in the New Living Translation: “When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results: sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21).

Human nature must be replaced by *God's* nature, which is defined by *love*, which is further defined by *God's commandments* (1 John 4:8; 5:3). That replacement begins when we receive the gift of God's Spirit. With God's Spirit, we can rip out the toxic weeds of sin and in their place cultivate the beautiful “fruit of the Spirit . . . love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

Take note that *even just one* sinful habit you're aware of that you refuse to strive to root out of your life will keep you out of the Kingdom of God. And God doesn't accept excuses. But God will *forgive* you when He sees sincere *repentance*. Be aware that true repentance has two ingredients: being truly sorry and making a complete change of direction from disobedience to obedience (2 Corinthians 7:9-10; 2 Chronicles 7:14).

## Needed: God's grace and God's Spirit

The only power that can effectively overcome evil is the power of the Holy Spirit. Only when “the Spirit of God *dwells in you*” and you “are *led* by the Spirit of God” are you able to “*put to death* the deeds of the body [actions motivated by human nature]” (Romans 8:9, 13-14). Notice Paul said “put to death.” The goal is to *permanently eliminate* sin.

So “what shall we do” to obtain God's Spirit? Peter answered that by saying, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission [forgiveness] of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37-38).

Peter here spoke of two of God's great gifts: 1) the forgiveness of sins and 2) the gift of His Holy Spirit. These are aspects of God's grace or favor towards us.

By grace God will make you one of His gardens or orchards. Then, by His Spirit, you must “tend and keep it,” fight the weeds and “*bear much fruit*” (Genesis 2:15; John 15:8).

## Beware: Evil comes in many forms

Often people don't recognize sin as sin because they aren't familiar with God's laws. Sin is defined as “lawlessness”—the breaking of God's laws (1 John 3:4). “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). So we need to read the Book! It not only reveals God's laws but also gives us lists of sins that help us understand the shocking variety of sin.

Consider what Jesus said about the many sins originating inside us: “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness” (Mark 7:21-22).

Paul referred to even more such sins,



describing the coming “last days” as especially evil: “For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:1-5; see also Romans 1:28-31).

Because there are countless kinds of sin, it’s very easy to become self-righteous.



## We must replace bad habits with good habits or the bad habits will return, like weeds returning when soil is left bare.

Consider that if we are shunning a thousand kinds of sins, we’re tempted to feel proud and self-satisfied because we are *only* indulging in three or four sins. But to God, every sin is an abominable, festering wound and a vile affront to His holiness. Every sin deserves the death penalty, and no amount of good behavior can make up for that. The good in our lives may seem to outweigh the bad on our scales, but that is not how God looks at it.

God does not want us to condone or

tolerate *even one* sin. This is what James was explaining in James 2:8-12.

When Paul referred to “all kinds of evil,” he said to “*flee* these things”—meaning *all* of them (1 Timothy 6:10-11).

### Some reasons why every sin is evil and destructive

Another problem is people excusing certain sins they consider to be minor. As Paul learned, we must think of *all sin* as “exceedingly sinful” (Romans 7:13). Sin is poison. If you put a drop of poison in a glass of water, the water will not neutralize the poison. The one drop poisons the whole glass.

Sin is the way of Satan, the ultimate *instigator* of sin—the one who is continually sowing the seeds of temptations and deceptions (Revelation 12:9, 17). Sinning, whether intentionally or not, is choosing to follow the devil—on a path away from God. Every temptation is a test of our loyalty to God.

And one sin leads to another. It spreads like an infection. One bad apple spoils the bunch. A diseased tree limb must be pruned before the disease creeps to other limbs. Weeds multiply and spread.

Paul compared sin to baker’s yeast, because a little yeast rapidly multiplies and spreads throughout a batch of dough. “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven [of sin]” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

### Beware also of “weeds” that are not inherently sinful

Jesus’ parable of the sower teaches several vital lessons (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23).

The preaching of the gospel is likened to sowing seeds. People who listen, believe, obey and grow are compared with “good ground” or fertile soil. In them, the seeds germinate, take root, sprout, grow and eventually bear much fruit (Matthew 13:23).

Although many people listen for a little while, the parable gives three major rea-

sons most people don’t persevere and bear fruit. One reason is the presence of too many weeds—activities, desires and worries that consume one’s time, thoughts and energy so that God gets crowded out.

“Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22). Mark’s account adds another thorn: “and the desires for other things” (Mark 4:19).

And compare Luke’s account: “Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Luke 8:14).

These verses point to several distractions. One is materialism and covetousness. Another is being *too busy*—having too many irons in the fire. Another is a complicated life that needs to be simplified. Another is worries that need to be replaced by trust in God. Another is too much pleasure-seeking.

The main lesson? Even things that are not sins in themselves can be likened to weeds when they interfere with spiritual growth and bearing fruit. In fact, we’re guilty of idolatry whenever God is not our top priority. Jesus told us to “seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [the necessities of life] shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

### Killing weeds, roots and all

The battle between the flesh and the Spirit is lifelong—we must never stop fighting. And when we fight sin, we fight to kill. As Paul admonishes us, “*put to death*, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5, NIV).

With many weeds, cutting them down won’t kill them. When a root is left in the ground, the weed grows back. A spiritual example is when a person hides a “root of bitterness” (Hebrews 12:15). Usually it eventually erupts into full-blown bitterness.

The word *eradicate* comes from two Latin words—*radix*, meaning “root,” and *ex*, meaning “out.” Eradicate means “root out” or “tear out by the roots.”

If you want to bear good fruit and much fruit, by God’s grace and power, you must keep eradicating one sin after another—roots and all. And if the same type of sin pops up again, attack it again! *Eradicate!* May God help you to succeed. **GN**



# Abundant Fresh Fruit: To Serve God and Share With Others

*We can become like God by having His Spirit dwelling in us. As we grow spiritually, we should see more and more evidence of that miracle—more and more “fruit of the Spirit.” And with more and more fruit, there is more and more to give to others!*

by Don Hooser

**R**ight in my own back yard is an Italian plum tree. I consider it a huge blessing! When we first moved here, I had no idea what kind of tree it was until I saw the fruit! Likewise, we are known to God and to other people by our “fruits” (Matthew 7:16).

Our tree is not very pretty except when it’s covered with spring blossoms. But what counts is this: *It is fruitful.* In most years it produces prolifically!

Two things give me great satisfaction. One is the delightful taste. When those plums are ripe, they’re soft and juicy and sweet and “plum good.” I feast on them for weeks!

My other joy is giving plums to others. Almost everyone loves this fabulous fruit! I spend hours and hours trying to harvest all the plums to give them away. I give away *many hundreds* of these large plums—to neighbors, fellow Church members and food banks. What a treat for me to see all the smiles!

## Lessons from fruit trees

Jesus Christ compared His followers to fruit trees. This comparison can teach us many valuable lessons.

To begin with, most fruit trees are relatively small and unimpressive compared to other trees. Most of us, likewise, are not that much to look at.

But that’s okay. It’s not outward beauty but inward beauty that “is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Peter 3:3-4). God doesn’t judge us by “outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7, emphasis added throughout).

Just as a “good tree” is one that bears “good fruit,” a *good heart* is one that *produces good spiritual fruit* (Matthew 7:17).

The “beauty” of fruit trees is their bountiful production of luscious fruit. Likewise, we are beautiful to God when we are producing good fruit and much fruit (Matthew

7:17; John 15:5, 8). God wants *quality and quantity!*

Those two goals and related principles were explained in the introductory article for this series—“Christ’s Command to Us: Bear Good Fruit and Much Fruit” in the January-February 2008 issue.)

## Every man’s need: A spiritual heart transplant

But there’s a problem that prevents us from producing good fruit. The natural “heart”—the thinking and inclination—of man is *not good!* Jesus said that “out of the heart of men” proceed a long list of evils (Mark 7:20-23).

When the apostle Paul listed typical sins of the natural man, he called them “works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19-21).

Then Paul listed the main traits of God’s character that are grown in us when we are implanted with His Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (verses 22-23). That is *good fruit!*

Most people manifest some of these virtues some of the time. But a person’s character will never be consistently defined by these qualities until he or she has God’s Holy Spirit.

In fact, all true “goodness, righteousness, and truth” is “the fruit [result and effect] of the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:9).

## Some people bear fake fruit

Sadly, we are tempted to be more concerned about *looking* good and *sounding* good than in *being* good. We want to make a *good impression* without doing all that is necessary to acquire a *pure and godly heart*. This is just *fake fruit!*

But we can’t fool God. Jesus saw right through the pretense of the self-righteous hypocrites of His day. He condemned them for that, saying, “You also outwardly

appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matthew 23:28).

And besides guarding against fake fruit in ourselves, God tells us to watch out for it in others. He doesn’t want us to be fooled. The Bible repeatedly cautions us to beware of religious deception. Jesus warned, “Beware of false prophets [teachers and preachers], who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits”—by their actions over time (Matthew 7:15-16).

Beware of impressive people with empty promises. They are like “clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit” (Jude 12).

Our best protection is to *know the Bible*. It alone has absolute authority because it is God’s revelation. Don’t be swayed by eloquent speeches or sermons that don’t agree with God’s Word. That fruit is polluted with poison!

But again, we must first be aware of what usually deceives us the most—our own minds and hearts! “The heart is more *deceitful* than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9, New American Standard Bible).

Here is what God prescribes for that sickness: “I will give you a *new heart* and put a *new spirit* within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26).

Remember that Jesus said, “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good” (Matthew 12:33, New International Version). Likewise, when God gives us a new heart, our spiritual fruit will be good.

## “Make the tree good and its fruit will be good”

Do you see? The *whole* tree must be healthy to produce lots of good fruit. Likewise, *we* must become spiritually healthy



and whole. We must be healed with a heart transplant that results in total transformation and conversion.

God gives us a new heart by implanting His “Spirit in our hearts” so that our human nature is gradually replaced with His godly nature (2 Corinthians 1:22).

How does God accomplish this? When God starts working with someone, He begins to give the person spiritual understanding of the Bible (1 Corinthians 2:10-14).

Then, through that understanding, “the goodness of God leads you to repentance” (Romans 2:4). What is repentance? It is the

cerely repentant, he or she should have an intense desire to obtain two of God’s great gifts—the gift of forgiveness and the gift of God’s Spirit.

The apostle Peter explained how to receive these gifts. He said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission [forgiveness] of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

When Peter said “be baptized,” everyone knew he meant immersion in water. Baptism symbolizes putting to death and burying the old way of life and being raised to “newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

stirring up and using the Spirit God makes available to us, or neglecting it.

### The great harvest

Jesus likened Himself to a master gardener who hopes for a bountiful harvest. But He also warned, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 7:19). It is cut down because the one who had access to God’s Spirit failed to produce fruit.

He went on to explain that religious works will not save you if you don’t also have the *works of obedience* to God’s commandments: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice *lawlessness!*’” (Matthew 7:21-23).

At a later time, Christ described the great spiritual harvest when He “will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice *lawlessness*, and will cast them into the furnace of fire . . . Then *the righteous will shine forth* as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Matthew 13:41-43).

When Christ returns, may you not be counted as an “unprofitable [unfruitful] servant” (Matthew 25:30). Instead, may you hear the joyful words, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (verse 23).

### In conclusion

As part of the conclusion for this series on the fruit of the Spirit, we encourage you to reread the wonderful 15th chapter of the book of John. In it, Jesus is talking heart to heart with His disciples—and heart to heart *with you*.

He tells us: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

When the life-giving Spirit flows from Christ into you and through you, it produces much good fruit: *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* (Galatians 5:22-23).

And when you have much fruit, you experience the joy of giving it away to others! **GN**



## Jesus Christ compared His followers to fruit trees. This comparison can teach us many valuable lessons.

experience of beginning to see one’s own sins and feeling deeply sorry for them (2 Corinthians 7:9-10). It also means committing to *turn one’s life around*—from a life of disobeying God to a life of love, obedience and service to God—and striving to follow through (Ezekiel 18:30-32).

Once a person has faith in God and is sin-

our lips” is a big part of our works, and God holds us accountable for our words (Hebrews 13:15; Matthew 12:36).

Jesus said, “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works” (Matthew 16:27). We will be judged by how we live—either

### Good works are also the fruit of godly character

Only God can make a tree, and He deserves the credit for the fruit. But God calls us to *work, not just watch*.

We must *work hard* in partnership with Him to *cultivate* the fruit! And good fruit includes good works. We show our love for God by works of *obedience* and *service!*

Forgiveness and salvation certainly can’t be earned by human works, but “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20). We are to “maintain good works” so we will be “profitable” to God and to others and not “unfruitful” (Titus 3:8, 14).

Good intentions, thoughts, feelings and words are not enough. We must be “*doers* of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Christ “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38), and we should follow His example.

We must walk the walk and practice what we preach. We must do more than profess—we must *produce!*

However, words are important too. The “fruit of

# The Perfect Example of the Fruit of the Spirit: Jesus Christ

by Vince Szymkowiak

**It's vital that Christians bear fruit in their lives—the fruit of the Spirit. But what does that fruit look like? In Jesus Christ we have the perfect example of what God's Spirit should produce in our lives.**

In this issue *The Good News* wraps up a series of articles on the fruit of the Holy Spirit as listed in Galatians 5:22-23. What better example can we look to for showing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives than our ultimate example, Jesus Christ?

He perfectly exhibited all these wonderful traits of the Holy Spirit, not only during His entire earthly ministry, but also during His arrest, trial and crucifixion. Of course, Jesus was more than just a man—He was God in the flesh. As such, He showed His disciples what can be accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit.

## Showing the fruit of the Spirit by His life

The first fruit of the Holy Spirit listed in Galatians 5 is *love*. Jesus' entire ministry was characterized by love. And the greatest demonstration ever of that love was the sacrifice He made for all of us. Jesus, who was a divine Being with the Father (John 1:1), sacrificed His heavenly power and glory to become a human being and subject Himself to painful humiliation, suffering and death for the sake of mankind (Philippians 2:5-11).

Jesus emphasized the fruit of *love* at His last meal—often referred to as “the last supper”—with the disciples. Notice His words: “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love . . . This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends” (John 15:9-13).

Of course, these weren't mere words to Him. Jesus *did* lay down His life for His friends, serving as the supreme example of love.

The second listed fruit of the Holy Spirit is *joy*. Christ was filled with *joy* at the

prospect of “bringing many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10). Hebrews 12:2 further tells us that “Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, . . . for the *joy* that was set before Him endured the cross, despising [disregarding] the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (emphasis added throughout).

Amazingly, just before He suffered, instead of thinking of His own upcoming cruel suffering, He reminded His disciples that His *joy* would “remain in you, and that your *joy* may be full” (John 15:11). He told them that they would be sorrowful over His departure, but “your sorrow will be turned into *joy*,” and that “your heart will *rejoice*, and your *joy* no one will take from you” (John 16:20-22).

This chapter concludes with Jesus reminding them that “in the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). And, after His resurrection, the first word Matthew records the resurrected Jesus as saying is “*Rejoice!*” (Matthew 28:9).

In spite of the terrible suffering Jesus endured for you and me, He counted it a joy to serve humanity by washing away our sins in His blood.

Jesus was also a man of *peace*, the next listed fruit. One of His very titles is the “Prince of *Peace*” (Isaiah 9:6). He referred to this fruit of the Spirit at the last supper when He said: “*Peace* I leave with you, My *peace* I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). One of the first statements to His followers after the resurrection was “*Peace* to you” (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21).

And, in the coming Kingdom of God on earth, over which Christ will be King of Kings, there will be no end to the *peace* that will characterize His glorious reign (Isaiah 9:7; Romans 14:17).

## Exhibiting fruit throughout His ministry

The fourth fruit of the Holy Spirit as listed in Galatians 5 is *longsuffering*. As the *Good News* article on this characteristic points out, the Greek words translated “longsuffering” also encompass the meanings of patience and endurance.

Jesus exhibited this fruit throughout His earthly ministry. The apostle Paul described an aspect of the ministry of Jesus this way: “I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited *patience*” (1 Timothy 1:16, New International Version). Even while suffering a painful death by crucifixion, Jesus exhibited the *patient endurance* to pray for those who were tormenting and killing Him (Luke 23:34).

*Kindness*, the next fruit on the list, was another hallmark of Jesus Christ's ministry. Paul noted this godly fruit as he wrote to Titus: “But when the *kindness* and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared . . . according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:4-5).

Christ's act of healing the ear of the high priest's servant Malchus even while being arrested is an incredible example of His kindness even under very difficult circumstances! Instead of worrying about Himself and His approaching pain, He reacted with kindness and compassion to Malchus' injury and immediately healed his ear, making the man whole again (Luke 22:51).

## Goodness and good news

The next fruit of the Holy Spirit listed is *goodness*. When Peter summarized the ministry of Jesus, the ministry of which he was an actual witness, he stated: “Jesus of Nazareth . . . went about doing *good*” (Acts 10:38). And Jesus, regarding His supreme sacrifice, referred to Himself as the *good* Shepherd who “gives His life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

His message is referred to in dozens of references as “the gospel,” a term meaning *good news*. Indeed, the entire ministry



and sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the greatest example of God's *goodness* toward humanity.

The next fruit is *faith* or *faithfulness*. Jesus had total trust and confidence in God the Father, and He was Himself *faithful* to the responsibility the Father gave to Him. Even as He stated that He was in anguish due to His impending crucifixion, He resolved to stay with the plan of redemption to the very end. He summarized His mission in John 12:27: "For this purpose I came to this hour." He continues to serve His Church today as "a merciful and *faithful* High Priest" (Hebrews 2:17).

*Gentleness* is listed next. The Greek work is *praus*, with a basic meaning of *gentle*, humble and meek. Jesus declared that He was "*gentle and lowly in heart*" (Matthew 11:29). Toward the end of His

(John 5:22), could have called down enormous power at any time against His enemies. But instead He exercised self-control throughout His ministry.

One example of this is found in Matthew 26:53-54. When Peter was trying to take things into his own hands, Christ reminded Peter that if He wished, He could call in "more than twelve legions of angels"—tens of thousands—to deal with those who were abusing Him. Instead, He stayed true to His calling, exercised godly self-control and allowed Himself to be arrested and crucified.

### **We should show the same fruit**

Jesus Christ not only exemplified all the fruit of the Holy Spirit throughout His ministry, but He has made it possible for us to produce the same spiritual fruit as



## **Jesus Christ perfectly exhibited all the wonderful traits of the Holy Spirit, not only during His entire earthly ministry, but also during His arrest, trial and crucifixion.**

ministry, He came to Jerusalem on a donkey, fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy that the King would come "*gentle and riding on a donkey*" (Matthew 21:5, New International Version). However, gentleness does not mean weakness, as some assume. Jesus was anything but weak.

The last fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5 is *self-control*, the ability to control one's behavior. Jesus, as the One to whom the Father committed judgment

well. As His true followers, He expects us to abide in Him and bear much fruit (John 15:4, 8). Indeed, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus will live His godly way of life through us if we are yielded to Him (Galatians 2:20).

Following His example, the converted children of God will be manifesting the fruit of the Spirit—not only now in this life, but also forever in the soon-coming Kingdom of God! **GN**



**W**ho's behind *The Good News* magazine? Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *The Good News* free to all who request it. Simply put, *The Good News* is provided by *people*—people from all walks of life, from all over the world.

But those people have a common goal: **to proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded** (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought—the wonderful *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all the problems that have long plagued humankind. Through the pages of *The Good News*, various booklets (also free) and our *Beyond Today* TV program, we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten our very survival.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of God's purpose and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

The United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services in your area, contact us. Visitors are always welcome.



For additional information, visit our Web site:

**[www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org)**



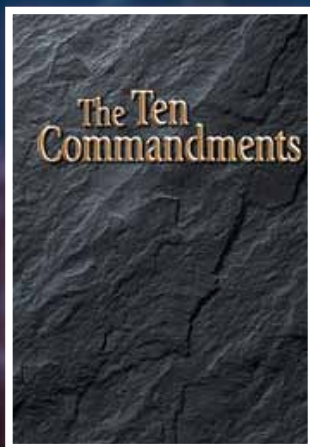
# They're Not the Ten Suggestions.

**M**ay 7 is Ten Commandments Day in the United States. But in reality, God intends that every day should be Ten Commandments Day. After all, the Ten Commandments are His instructions for a safe, secure, free and fulfilling life and a blueprint for a peaceful and prosperous society.

How much do you know about the Ten Commandments? Sadly, most people know little about them at all. Few people can name more than three or four of them.

Don't you think it's about time you learned what the Ten Commandments are all about? Those who take the time to study them find they're not a list of "Thou shalt nots," but are in fact God's guide to the good life. That's why the Bible calls them "the royal law" and "the law of liberty."

There's much more to these commands than meets the eye. They're not just God's way of preventing us from having a good time. They're designed to protect us, our families and our communities. They're a guide to transforming the way we think, what we do and how we live.



We've prepared a free, eye-opening booklet that we'd love to share with you. Just contact us at our office in your country (or the office nearest you), or request or download it from our Web site at [www.ucg.org/booklets](http://www.ucg.org/booklets).

Discover for yourself why they're the *Ten Commandments*, not the *Ten Suggestions*.

Visit our Web sites: [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org) and [www.ucg.org/booklets](http://www.ucg.org/booklets)

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