FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION

We often say that God loves us just as we are, but that He also loves us enough not to let us stay that way. Salvation is not just a one-time event. It is an ongoing process in which we are transformed by the Spirit of God and fitted for heaven. The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives making us holy is called sanctification. This lesson is about the changes we can expect in our character and personality as we give ourselves over to the work of the Holy Spirit.

In Galatians 5:16-26 the Apostle Paul describes life in the Spirit. He says, first, that life in the Spirit differs from the life we lived before we knew Christ. How does it differ? In two fundamental ways. One, it means that we remove sin from our lives. We no longer engage in the same destructive, violent and self-indulgent behaviors we once did. Two, it means that we develop new behaviors and practices that reflect our character in Christ.

Fruit is a word in the Bible that is used to describe the results of God's work in our lives. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruit." (Matthew 7:16) By making that statement, Jesus did not specifically identify the changes that will occur in the lives of believers, but He did insist that such changes will occur and that they will be obvious changes, making believers readily identifiable. Believers' lives will be changed by the Spirit. If we are not changing and improving, the implication is that we might not really be believers. In Galatians, Paul reveals more precisely the nature of the changes that will take place.

Believers are to grow in the nine characteristics identified by Paul. He calls them the fruit of the Spirit and that is a collective term. It indicates that we are to grow in all these areas. To grow only in one or two of them is not really an option. For example, we cannot grow in joy and love without also growing in patience. The Spirit is producing changes in our lives, making us more Christlike.

If it is the Holy Spirit who works these changes in our lives, what is our role in the process? Scripture teaches us that we have a very important role. We are called to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2:12) So while the Spirit does most of the work, we are, in a sense, co-workers in the process. A lack of effort on our part can frustrate the Spirit. Our commitment to working with the Spirit will help us grow.

It is my hope that this study will encourage you to take seriously the pursuit of the sanctified life. With God's help, our lives can be shaped for eternity; transformed to be a blessing.

God Bless,

Pastor John

LESSON ONE

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT
GALATIANS 5:16-26

INTRODUCTION

In Galatians, Paul reminds us that by Christ's sacrifice we were freed from sin and death. We are to live a different and better life, one made possible by the power of the Spirit. We should therefore not subjugate ourselves again to powers and sins that held us captive in the past. We are to work with the Spirit to grow in the fruit of the Spirit.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) Paul says that if we live by the Spirit, we will not gratify what?

2) If we are led by the Spirit, what are we not under?

3) What are some of the acts of the sinful nature?

4) What kind of verb does fruit take?

5) What has been crucified with Christ?

6) What are we to live by?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) What does it mean to be crucified to our sinful nature, but alive in the Spirit?

2) In what way are the sinful nature and the Spirit still at war in the life of the believer?

3) What does it mean to say that those who are led by the Spirit are not under the law?

4) What does it mean when Paul said that those who continue to be ruled by the sinful nature will not inherit the Kingdom of God?

5) The fruit of the Spirit is listed as one entity (a collective that takes the singular verb "is"). What does that tell us about the fruit of the Spirit?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) Do you feel like the sinful nature has been crucified in you?

2) Do you feel like Christ and your sinful nature are still at war? To what degree? Which side is winning?

3) Are those acts of the sinful nature listed by Paul the same ones you would have listed?

4) Do you feel that you are growing in the fruit of the Spirit? Are there any areas you particularly struggle with? Why?

5) Why is it important that we not become conceited provoking and envying one another?

Prayer

Dear Father, grower of spiritual fruit.
Let the fruit of the Spirit blossom, mature, and ripen in my life
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
There is no law against these.
Let me possess them!

Since I belong to Christ,
I have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.
Let me live by the Spirit.
Let me walk by the Spirit!
Let me show no self-conceit,
give no provocation,
have no envy toward anyone else.
Let me live in, through, and for Christ Jesus,
as he lives in, through, and for me and his whole church.

In the name of Jesus I ask you to perfect us,
whatever that may take,
and give us the grace to endure your renovation process.

Amen.

*~ posted on the **Heartlight** website. http://www.heartlight.org/cgi-shl/praying_paul/pwp.pl?190*

LESSON TWO

LOVE AND JOY
1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-13
PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

INTRODUCTION

We are given many gifts by God, but the one essential gift we need is God's love. It is essential, because without God's love it is impossible for us to be born again or to share the good news with others.

There is a profound difference between joy and happiness. Happiness is about outward circumstances and joy is about inward realities. Since the Spirit lives inside us, we can have a joy and contentment that outward circumstances cannot take away. Live in that joy.

LESSON ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) What never fails?

2) What three things will remain into eternity?

3) What command does Paul repeat in Philippians?

4) What traits are tied to joy?

5) What kind of things are we to think about?

LESSON TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) What does it mean to say that love never fails?

2) Why is it important to know that love lasts into eternity and is the greatest of those things which will endure forever?

3) Why is Paul's command to rejoice, and rejoice again?

4) Why is it important to know our joy is tied in with thanksgiving and with the peace of God?

5) Why is it important for us to fix our thoughts on higher things?

LESSON THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) Where does our love come from?

2) What does it mean to you to think that your love will last into eternity?

3) Do you feel that you have real joy in your life?

4) Do you think joy is connected in your life with peace and thanksgiving?

5) How easy is it for you to focus on the higher and better things of life?

PRAYER

Lord help me to fix my eyes on the love you share with me every day. And, may I be reminded of the grace and mercy you extended through your son as I go through my life. Lord, may I look to your love as a guide to love others. And not just those who are easy to love. But God give me your eyes so that I may see all your children the way you do. Help me please God to love myself the way that you love me. For I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Lord help me to find my joy in you. God, you are the source of all good things and a life that draws its strength from you is a life of true and deep joy. Even in the tough times help me to rejoice in your goodness and your plan for my life. And, help me to seek you, as the well that never runs dry so that my joy can overflow into the lives of everyone I meet.

From Godupdates.com

LESSON THREE

PEACE AND PATIENCE
JOHN 16: 31-33
ROMANS 5:1-5

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important words in the Bible is the word peace. In Hebrew the word is "Shalom" which we frequently translate as "the peace that passes all understanding". It does not mean that we are never in conflict. Rather it means that we are at peace with God. It is a peace which the struggles of the world cannot take away.

Patience is the ability to hold fast to what is right and true, weathering difficulties, delays and attacks without getting angry or upset. It is a difficult virtue to maintain when our plans are frustrated. Can we really grow in patience?

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) What is the context of the passage from John?

2) What prediction did Jesus make about the upcoming actions of the disciples?

3) Why did Jesus tell them these things?

4) In Romans, Paul connects all kinds of experiences. What elements of these connections jump out at you?

5) What produces character?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) In John, what did Jesus mean when He said, "You believe at last."?

2) Jesus predicted that the disciples would be scattered. Why was that prediction important?

3) What does it mean to have peace in the midst of trouble?

4) Is patience the same thing as persistence?

5) Do you agree with the chain of connections Paul has made?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) What does it mean for you to be at peace?

2) Do you feel at peace even in the midst of trouble?

3) What does it mean to you that Jesus' has overcome the world?

4) What is the connection between faith, peace and patience in your life?

5) What is the connection in your mind between patience, character and hope?

A Prayer for Peace and Patience

Father God, I often find myself overwhelmed by circumstances that are beyond my control, and I am easily distracted by things that don't matter. Please forgive me for not consistently placing my trust in You. Even when I am faced with intense situations, You are still with me. You are the Creator of peace, and I have access to Your peace-filled presence whenever I draw near to You. So instead of silencing Your Holy Spirit when I start to feel anxious or discouraged, help me to make room in my heart and mind to experience the peace You freely give.

Holy Spirit, create in me a clean heart that seeks the best in others. Help me to show empathy and compassion to everyone, and to do so with gentleness and respect. When people or circumstances don't meet my expectations, empower me to show grace and understanding. Help me to see my situations from Your perspective so that I can rejoice at all times and show patience when needed. In Jesus' name, Amen.

From blog.youversion.com

LESSON FOUR

KINDNESS AND GOODNESS
MATTHEW 5:38-48
EPHESIANS 4: 29-32

INTRODUCTION

When we talk about kindness and goodness as part of the fruit of the Spirit, it is important to remember that in these areas we are imitators of Jesus Christ, seeking to emulate the character of our Savior. To what degree can we be Christlike in this life? What role does the Holy Spirit play in empowering this possibility?

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) In Matthew it is clear that the world lives one way while we are called to live in a different way. How is this "different way" described?

2) Who are we called to love?

3) In what respect are we called to be like God?

4) In Ephesians, how are we told to speak?

5) What are we to get rid of in our lives?

6) How is kindness manifested in our lives?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) What does it mean to give away your cloak or to walk the extra mile?

2) How can we love our enemy? In what ways is that possible? Is it impossible in any ways?

3) How is it possible to be perfect?

4) How would you define unwholesome language?

5) What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit?

6) How is forgiveness tied into goodness and kindness?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) How good are you at going the extra mile, turning the other cheek, or giving away your cloak?

2) Do you have any enemies to love? Why?

3) Is being perfect in any way a goal for your life?

4) How would you evaluate the speech that typically comes out of your mouth?

5) What do you do to rid yourself of bitterness and malice?

6) How big a part of your life is the forgiveness of God?

A Prayer for Kindness and Goodness

God, thank You for continually showing me Your steadfast love and mercy. You are so good! Lord, I frequently find myself easily angered, hurt, or offended. Please change the way I think and behave. It is through Your Spirit that I am forgiven and empowered. So today, I invite You to guide me, direct me, and show me how to display kindness to others as You have displayed kindness toward me.

Holy Spirit, there is nowhere I can run to escape Your presence! You won't give up on me because You are too kind to leave me the way You found me. You guide me, counsel me, and show me the paths that lead to life. Today, make me more aware of Your goodness so that I can share Your goodness with others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

From blog.youversion.com

LESSON FIVE

FAITHFULNESS AND GENTLENESS
PSALM 33:4, LUKE 4:42-48, EPHESIANS 4:1-7

INTRODUCTION

When we gain the fruit of the Spirit, we are developing the character of God, becoming more and more Christlike. God is faithful and just. God is kind and patient. We usually say that God is faithful, even when we are not, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, we too can become faithful. Christ was humble and meek. He did not seek to win us through power, but rather through His gentle love. We can learn to be gentle, even as God is gentle with us.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) What does the Psalm tell us about the character of God?

2) What does the passage in Luke tell us about the kind of faithfulness God expects from us?

3) Are there gradations in God's expectations?

4) In Ephesians, Paul urges Christians to live lives worthy of what?

5) What attributes are linked with gentleness?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) What does it mean to say that God is faithful in all that He does?

2) In our passage from Luke, why do you think that God expects more from those who are given more?

3) Why do you think that the focus in the passage in Luke is on those who are unfaithful?

4) In Ephesians, what does it mean to live a life worthy of our calling?

5) Why is unity linked to humility and gentleness?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) What is the importance of God's faithfulness to you?

2) Do you think of yourself as a servant entrusted for a time with the things of God? How would this view (how does this view) shape your decisions and actions?

3) Do you feel that you have been given much or little?

4) Do you think you are gentle in your interactions with others? What does gentleness mean to you?

5) How connected do you feel to other believers?

A Prayer for Faithfulness

God, You make all things beautiful in their proper timing. Nothing is too hard for You to accomplish! You are faithful to keep Your promises. But so often, I forget this and grow discouraged when my situations don't seem to change. In those moments, it's easy to forget that You are not done working. Through Your Holy Spirit, please change the way I think and behave. When I start to grow weary, help me to remember that You are with me, You are faithful, and You have given me everything I need to live a faith-filled life today.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

From blog.youversion.com

LESSON SIX

SELF-CONTROL
2 TIMOTHY 1:3-7, 2 PETER 1:5-9

INTRODUCTION

One of the most interesting things about the fruit of the Spirit is that they are given by the Spirit. Yet the last fruit is self-control. It would seem that self-control is something we would have to develop ourselves, and yet here it is mentioned as a gift. This challenges us to think about the role we have to play in working with the Spirit to develop all of the gifts we receive from the hand of God.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) Paul is writing to Timothy. How many generations of Christians are there in Timothy's line?

2) What kind of spirit has God given to believers?

3) In 2 Peter, what other good qualities are tied in with Self-control?

4) If we have the gifts listed by Peter, what will they make us?

5) What does Peter say about those who are not growing in the virtues that he mentions?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) To what degree, if any, can the Christian faith be inherited?

2) How can self-control be a gift?

3) How is self-control attached to power and love?

4) What do you think of the list of virtues that Peter strings together?

5) What does it say about us if we are not growing in virtue as Christians?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) Would you describe yourself as self-indulgent or self-disciplined?

2) Is there an area of self-control in which you are lacking?

3) Does self-control empower you to live in a Christian way?

4) Are you developing the fruit of the Spirit as a whole? How about the Christian virtues which Peter lists?

5) Peter seems to be suggesting that we are either growing or dying. Would you agree with that assessment?

6) Do you think of self-control as a gift or as a product of your own efforts?

A Prayer for Self-Control

Holy Spirit, let the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be pleasing to You! I don't want to grieve You by living in a manner unworthy of the calling You've placed on my life. Instead, I want to live a disciplined, thoughtful life because I know this honors You. So when I am tempted to give in to anger, selfishness, or pride, help me to consider others as better than myself, and allow me to do this with humility and grace. I surrender control of my life to You.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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