

Study Through the Bible

Galatians: The Fruit of the Spirit

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Galatians: The Fruit of the Spirit - Study 1

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Love

We can love others like Jesus loves us.

Paul's underlying theme in Galatians is the grace of God, supplied through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His sacrifice is the supreme example of Godly love, and we, as imitators of Christ, need to reciprocate this love by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Love as a fruit of the Spirit is radically different from the kind of love that our contemporary society idealizes. The purpose of this study is to help us discover and experience more deeply the fruit of the Spirit of love as we battle against our sinful nature and imitate the love of Christ.

Scripture: Galatians 5:13–26

Based on:

“The Fruit of the Spirit: God’s Recipe for a Full Life,” Series Builder by John A. Huffman Jr.

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Robert Munger, in his booklet entitled *My Heart, Christ’s Home*, urges us to open the front door of our lives to Jesus Christ and invite Him into every room of the house. He may have come in the front door at our salvation, but if we leave Jesus Christ, coat in hand, standing in the vestibule of our life’s home, we will never realize the fullness of His presence. We must honestly and openly invite him into every area of our life. It’s only when we endeavour to keep no secrets from Him, from Whom there are no secrets anyway, that we experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Discussion starters:

[Q] What makes it so hard to love?

[Q] What does inviting Christ into every area of our lives have to do with our ability to love?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: To understand the fruit of the Spirit, we must understand our sinful nature.

Read Galatians 5:16–21. The fruit of the Spirit is a core issue for living the Christian life. The context of Paul’s teaching on the fruit of the Spirit includes the consequences of obeying our own sinful nature. Ignoring our need for a connection with the Holy Spirit will lead us to search for spiritual empowerment on our own, often resulting in destructive behaviour.

Read Romans 7:18–25. Even the apostle Paul was engaged in a struggle between his sinful nature and the work of the Holy Spirit in his life. Our salvation from this sin nature is both instantaneous (through the imputation of Christ’s righteousness) and gradual (through the continued empowerment of the Holy Spirit).

[Q] Why does our sinful nature make it so impossible to live the Christian life? Why do we need to admit that?

[Q] What difference do you think the Holy Spirit could make in our struggle against sin?

[Q] Attempt to explain your understanding of our instantaneous salvation from sin and the ongoing struggle we have with it.

Although Christ died for our sin and washes us clean from the penalty of that sin, we are still sinful. It's a lifelong process to recognize that sin and turn it over to God, asking Him to teach us and empower us to behave in a way contrary to our nature.

Teaching point two: To bear fruit we must be connected to the vine.

Read Galatians 5:13–15 and John 15:1–5. We must not use our freedom in Christ to indulge our sinful nature. God, as the vine, provides the only connection through which the Holy Spirit can work in our lives to produce fruit.

David Timothy demonstrates the kind of fruit that results from being connected to the vine. In the summer of 2003, David bought an old van with 265,000 miles on it, with the help of his wife and a friend. They dubbed it SoupMobile and started taking food to the homeless of Dallas, Texas.

Timothy had wanted to open a soup kitchen for a long time, partly because he grew up poor and hungry, though never homeless. In the name of Christ, SoupMan—who calls himself a nondenominational Christian—provides over 3,000 meals each month.

Volunteers, donations from some restaurants and grocery stores, and his own willingness to devote 60 to 70 hours a week to the ministry sustain his work.

“He does things for us that other people would not do, like bring us food, clothes, water, juice, cakes, dog food, blankets,” said a 36-year-old woman. “He manages to find toys for homeless children on their birthdays.”

“He don’t have to come out here,” commented one homeless man, “but he come out here because he got God in him.”

[Q] How much does Jesus say we can accomplish without being connected to him (John 15:5)? Obviously, all sorts of people accomplish things without being connected to Jesus, so what do you think Jesus is talking about here? What is it that we can’t accomplish without His help?

[Q] What is the difference between being led by the Spirit and being led by the law (Gal. 5:18)? Why do we fail when we simply make rules for ourselves?

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) I master my sinful nature by sheer discipline.
- 2) I fail at mastering my sinful nature, and so I give up.
- 3) I fail at mastering my sinful nature, so I throw myself on Christ for his power.
- 4) I master my sinful nature by admitting my sin and starting over.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? What is the difference between the four positions? How does your position affect the way you live?

Teaching point three: Love is the first fruit of the Spirit.

Christian love (*agape*) differs radically from ordinary human love and is a manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit. Agape love is sacrificial and unconditional and is best illustrated by Jesus Christ. Read Philippians 2:1–8.

In his book *Dad the Family Coach*, Dave Simmons describes the shape love took in the life of his daughter:

I took Helen (8 years old) and Brandon (5 years old) to the Cloverleaf Mall in Hattiesburg to do a little shopping. As we drove up, we spotted a Peterbilt 18-wheeler parked with a big sign on it that said, “Petting Zoo.” The kids jumped up in a rush and asked, “Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?” “Sure,” I said, flipping them both a quarter before walking into Sears. They bolted away, and I felt free to take my time looking for a scroll saw. A petting zoo consists of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids pay their money and stay in the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shop.

A few minutes later, I turned around and saw Helen walking along behind me. I was shocked to see she preferred the hardware department to the petting zoo. Recognizing my error, I bent down and asked her what was wrong.

She looked up at me with those giant, limpid, brown eyes and said sadly, “Well, Daddy, it cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter.” Then she said the most beautiful thing I ever heard. She repeated the family motto. The family motto is, “Love is action!” She had given Brandon her quarter, and no one loves cuddly furry creatures more than Helen. She had watched Sandy take my steak and say, “Love is action!” She had watched both of us do and say, “Love is action!” for years around the house and Kings Arrow Ranch. She had heard and seen “Love is action,” and now she had incorporated it into her little lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think I did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as I finished my errands, I took Helen to the petting zoo. We stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. I had 50 cents burning a hole in my pocket; I never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it. Because she knew the whole family motto. It’s not, “Love is action.” It’s, “Love is sacrificial action!” Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. When you love, benefits accrue to another’s account. Love is for you, not for me. Love gives; it doesn’t grab. Helen gave her quarter to Brandon and wanted to follow through with her lesson. She knew she had to taste the sacrifice. She wanted to experience that total family motto. Love is sacrificial action.

[Q] Why do you think love is listed as the first fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5:22)? How do all the rest stem from love?

[Q] In what ways is Christ’s love for you different than your love for other people?

[Q] How can we let the Holy Spirit love through us?

We admit that we can't love a person as Christ does and ask Him to pour his love through us toward that person. We must ask Him to let us see that person through His eyes and respond as He would.

Activity

Purpose: *To demonstrate that God can give us power to love others as he does.*

Activity: *Name any characteristics that others have which annoy them.*

Record these on a whiteboard or poster board under a column labelled Annoy. Make a column next to it labelled Love. Ask them what it would look like to love a person with that annoying characteristic.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

All Christians are called to embody agape love, which can only be accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit. By asking the question, "What would Jesus do?" as the first step to making decisions, we can experience the guiding of the Holy Spirit and discover the fruit of the Spirit in our own lives.

[Q] Why would asking ourselves, "What would Jesus do?" help us to live out the fruit of the Spirit? How does that allow the Holy Spirit to guide us? Why is this only the first step? What are the limitations of this question? How else can we let the Holy Spirit work through us?

[Q] How can you let Christ's love for you soak deep into your soul so that you'll want to love as He does?

[Q] List some opportunities you have to let the Holy Spirit love others through you.

Pray that God will give you the strength and joy to love as He does.

—Study by John A. Huffman Jr., with JoHannah Reardon

Galatians: The Fruit of the Spirit - Study 2

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Joy

God designed you to be joyous.

Our culture has incorrectly linked joy with the presence of comfort and the absence of pain. The Holy Spirit empowers us to experience a joy that is not dependent on the circumstances of life. This study attempts to identify what true joy is and to explain how we can experience it. True joy is rooted in a proper relationship with God and others.

Scripture: Galatians 5:22–23

Based on:

“The Fruit of the Spirit: God’s Recipe for a Full Life,” Series Builder by John A. Huffman Jr.

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with Participant’s Guide.

The tension between virtue and vice has been explored often throughout human history, usually in terms of ethics or dualism. Paul—inspired by the Holy Spirit—moves past both traditions to form the “ethical dualism” of the flesh versus the Spirit.

Paul combined two schools of thought in this passage in Galatians. The Greeks had always been driven by ethics—the thought that certain behaviours were good (virtues) and other behaviours were bad (vices). Jewish thought, however, focused on humanity’s dualism: the struggle between our good and evil natures. Paul combined these two schools of thought into an “ethical dualism,” in which we have been freed from our evil nature through Christ’s sacrifice and given the opportunity to produce virtuous actions through the power of the Holy Spirit. One of these virtuous actions is joy, a product of the Spirit.

Discussion starters:

[Q] What comes to your mind when you hear the word *joy*?

[Q] Describe someone you know who is joyous. What makes them that way?

[Q] What’s the difference between joy that comes from God and happiness that comes from circumstances? Should we be happy if we are joyous? Was Paul happy? Why or why not?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Christian joy is higher than secular happiness and is found in God’s sovereignty.

Joy is found in a right relationship with God, by having our sins forgiven and being in fellowship with Him. Read 1 Peter 1:8–9. If you have not experienced the joy of the Lord, you can; if you have lost the joy of the Lord, you can get it back.

Joy is not dependent on pleasant circumstances.

Read Romans 14:17–18; 15:13, 32–33.

Joy comes only from God and helps us to delight in Him and all He provides for us.

Helmut Thielicke has this to say about laughter and the church:

Should we not see that lines of laughter about the eyes are just as much marks of faith as are the lines of care and seriousness? Is it only earnestness that is baptized? Is laughter pagan? We have already allowed too much that is good to be lost to the church and cast many pearls before swine. A church is in a bad way when it banishes laughter from the sanctuary and leaves it to the cabaret, the nightclub, and the toastmasters.

Where does such an attitude come from? From our absolute trust in the God who loves us and has a design for our lives. Read Luke 10:21. As we realize that God knows what He is doing and that our lives fit into a bigger plan, we gain joy in being part of an eternal hope.

[Q] How can we get joy? What is it based on? How can it last in spite of negative circumstances?

[Q] What does the world consider joyous? What does it base that joy on?

[Q] What was the apostle Paul's joy based on? How could he maintain that joy in spite of being kicked out of cities, jailed, beaten, and stoned?

Teaching point two: True joy is not eliminated by suffering.

The absence of suffering does not produce true joy, and the presence of pain does not eliminate true joy. For example, women who have given birth understand that suffering and joy are not mutually exclusive. Read James 1:2–4 and John 16:20–24.

Bethany Hamilton, once ranked as the best amateur teen surfer in Hawaii, lost an arm to a tiger shark in October 2003. Both her compassion and competitiveness, however, have reached a new level.

Soon after the attack she began to raise money to restore a man's eyesight. While visiting New York City, she gave her ski coat to homeless girl. When asked about the gift, she said she had more than she needed in life.

Referring to her competitiveness, the story in *USA Today* states: "As always, Hamilton remains undaunted. She has told her father that if having only one arm proved detrimental to reaching the top in competitive surfing, then she'd see about playing soccer."

Her pastor, Steve Thompson, said, "She's looking forward to the future. She's asking herself, 'How can I show the world I still have a life, that I enjoy my life, and that my life is filled with joy?' She has an underlying trust that God is taking care of her."

[Q] According to the passage we read in James, how can we count it joy when we suffer? What needs to be our goal for that to happen?

We must have the goal of growing in Christ and becoming like Him.

[Q] From Jesus' words in John, what will bring us joy? What will make it complete according to this passage?

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) I will only have true joy in heaven.
- 2) I can experience true joy because I know the One who makes heaven what it is.
- 3) I can only experience joy when my life is free of trouble.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? What is the difference between the positions? How does your position affect the way you live?

Teaching point three: True joy is found in serving the Lord and others.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1–2. There is no one more miserable than a selfish person. What a difference there is between the Dead Sea—which only takes in water and is undrinkable—with the Sea of Galilee, which is drinkable because its water flows both in and out. When we take in God’s love through his Word and his Spirit, we have an overflowing abundance to give to others.

Pounding hammers and whirring saws are Jim Paputsa’s tools of trade. But when winter weather halts his work, the Chicago Heights, Illinois, builder heads to the Dominican Republic knowing a new adventure awaits him.

Jim first travelled to the island with one of his workers, Victor Rodriguez. The Rodriguez family lives in a remote, mountainous, coffee-growing region where narrow, treacherous roads connect the widely scattered villages. Jim stayed for a month, repairing homes and improving water supplies and sanitation. “All I could offer was my work. I had my Bible with me, but I couldn’t speak much Spanish. Victor did a lot of translating.”

Back home, Jim began studying Spanish. When he returned the following winter, he noticed something he had missed before. “There were a lot of barefoot kids—too poor to afford even rubber shoes.”

Before his third trip, Jim asked his church [Orland Park Christian Reformed] to donate shoes. “I expected maybe 50 pairs—I got 250! They covered my entire living room floor.”

They also filled large coffee bean baskets slung on the back of a mule Jim borrowed on his arrival. “I trekked up some pretty tricky paths and with every pair of shoes, I gave away tracts or Bibles.” Then he waited to see what would happen.

Jim didn’t have to wait long. One afternoon, a boy ran up to him shouting, “Christian! Christian! Come here!”

“He took me to his house,” Jim explains, the memory still fresh. “There the whole family had gathered on the patio where they dry their coffee beans. They wanted me to read the Bible to them!”

With his English/Spanish Bible, Jim read key passages phonetically. He spent many days with new friends who waved him on to their porches to read.

Now that the shoes have opened doors, Jim can’t wait to go back. “These people have nothing, yet the simplest things bring them such joy. Hopefully, that joy will be multiplied as they discover what God can give them.”

[Q] How do we become so full of God's love that we overflow with joy? Share some times when you've experienced that joy.

[Q] If we find our joy fading, what should we do? What do you think Paul and the other disciples did?

[Q] What renews your joy more than anything else? How can you make sure you have time for that?

Activity

Purpose: *To demonstrate that only God can give us complete joy.*

Activity: *Put out a variety of inanimate objects, such as a pen, a pot, a hammer, a book, writing paper, a paint brush, a vase, etc. Each person in the group picks one object that represents some way they can serve Christ. For example, the pen may represent writing a letter. The pot may represent cooking a meal for someone.*

As you tell the group how you would love to serve Christ, share how that service might bring you joy.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Joy is a quality of life that has its roots in God, and is found by putting Jesus first, others second, and yourself last.

[Q] How can we make sure our joy is rooted in God and not in our circumstances?

[Q] Tell the group one thing that might change in your life if you put Jesus first, others second, and yourself last. How might that change bring you more joy than you have now?

Ask the group to pray for you concerning this area.

—Study by John A. Huffman Jr., with JoHannah Reardon

Galatians: The Fruit of the Spirit - Study 3

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Peace

Empty your anxieties by filling up with God.

Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, the world has never been at peace; however, it yearns for peace more than anything. This study will help us to identify and experience the peace of God. Authentic peace is a fullness of life, found in a right relationship with God, which allows us to let go of our anxiety.

Scripture: Galatians 5:22–23

Based on:

“The Fruit of the Spirit: God’s Recipe for a Full Life,” Series Builder by John A. Huffman Jr.

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Billy Graham says that spiritual gifts are divided among believers, but the fruit of the Spirit should be manifested in all believers. All of us long for the peace of the Spirit. Peace allows us to face the worst this world can throw at us with calm, serenity, and trust.

Henry Drummond says, “Christ’s life outwardly was one of the most troubled lives that was ever lived: tempest and tumult, tumult and tempest, the waves breaking over it all the time. But the inner life was a sea of glass. The great calm was always there” (LEADERSHIP, Vol. 2, no. 4). This is the kind of peace Christ wants to give us.

Discussion starters:

[Q] What kind of things do you worry about?

[Q] Have you ever experienced peace in a situation that was chaotic or unpredictable? Tell us about it. Why did you have peace?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Authentic peace comes from God.

Jesus offers peace as a free gift in the form of a right relationship with God. We cannot purchase it for ourselves. P. T. Forsyth says, “It is a popular notion that the warmest part of this island [England] must be in the centre, away from the cold waters and high gales of the inconstant sea. But the scientific fact is just the reverse. The sea has a benign and steadying influence upon the climate of the coast. The coldest place in England, according to the charts, is a spot at its very heart.

“There is a certain grace that comes to our shore and knocks, yea beats, and even lashes, there; and it has more of the changeless love of God in it than in all the affections that sweeten the inlands of life. Sea and shore may indeed meet in storm. But our peace lies through the storm” (Adapted from “The Grace of the Gospel,” LEADERSHIP, Vol. 4, no. 3).

Read John 14:25–27 and John 16:33.

[Q] According to the John 14 passage, what is the peace Jesus Christ leaves with us?

[Q] How can we avoid letting our hearts be troubled and afraid?

[Q] Based on John 16:33, what should give us peace? Why should the fact that Jesus had overcome the world give us peace?

Peace comes from being able to trust that God is in charge and knows what He's doing. No matter what we suffer on earth, we can have an eternal perspective that Jesus will one day set everything right.

Teaching point two: Authentic peace from God is different from the world's view of peace.

The world inaccurately describes peace as a negative: the absence of war; but authentic peace is primarily a positive: a fullness of life made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Corrie Ten Boom was imprisoned in Ravensbrueck concentration camp in World War II for harbouring Jewish refugees in her home. Her book *The Hiding Place* is a story of having peace in the most awful of circumstances. In her book *Each New Day*, she said, "I looked on Jesus and the dove of peace entered my heart. I looked at the dove of peace; and lo ... off he went."

When we place our trust or hope on anything other than Jesus, we will be disappointed.

Read Colossians 3:15–17.

[Q] How can we let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts? What do verses 16 and 17 have to do with peace?

[Q] What part does God's Word play in our peace? Why?

[Q] What part does thankfulness play in our peace? Can you be thankful and anxious at the same time?

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) I find it hardest to experience peace when things are in chaos.
- 2) I find it hardest to experience peace when I don't know the outcome.
- 3) I find it hardest to experience peace when I'm experiencing injustice.
- 4) I find it hardest to experience peace when those around me are unreasonable.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? How do you think you could have victory in this area and experience Christ's peace? **Pray for each other in this matter.**

Teaching point three: Authentic peace passes all human understanding.

Peace is not dependent on outside circumstances. Greg Asimakoupoulos shares this perspective on God's peace:

"During the recent uprisings in the Middle East, Ron Jones, who serves with the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Israel, communicated the following in his prayer letter:

The result of the fighting and killing has left a profound sense of discouragement that hovers over the country. Several times we have come into closer contact with this conflict than our comfort zone allowed.

Yesterday a friend shared with us something she observed that was a delightful reminder of God’s care for us. She watched a shepherd caring for his flock near the area where guns are fired. Every time the shots rang out the sheep scattered in fright. The shepherd then touched each of them with his staff and spoke calmly to them, and the sheep settled down immediately because they trusted the shepherd. And then another shot sounded, and the same routine happened again. Each time, the sheep needed the shepherd to orient them again and to reassure them they were safe.

“We are like those sheep, and our Shepherd reaches out and touches us with his staff, speaking words of calm and comfort,” says Asimakoupoulos.

Jesus offers a “warrior peace” that protects and secures us, releasing us from anxiety.

Read Philippians 4:4–7.

[Q] According to this passage, what contributes to this kind of peace?

Notice that thankfulness once again is tied to peace, as well as prayers and petitions.

[Q] Have you ever experienced peace that made no sense in light of your circumstances? What gave you that peace?

Activity

Purpose: *To demonstrate that God can give us peace no matter what our circumstances.*

Activity: *Form groups of three or four. Give each group a newspaper. Ask them to find a story of someone who is experiencing difficult circumstances and to explain how that person could experience God’s peace if they trusted Him.*

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

In the autumn of 1873, Horatio Spafford, a wealthy Chicago businessman, placed his wife, Anna, and their four children on the *Ville du Havre* sailing from New York to France. He was forced to stay in the United States for several more weeks to settle some business matters before he could journey to join the family in Europe.

The evening of November 21 found the *Ville du Havre* prow east toward France on a calm Atlantic. The journey was progressing beautifully. A few hours later, about two o’clock in the morning on November 22, the *Ville du Havre* was carrying its sleeping passengers over a quiet sea when two terrific claps like thunder were followed by frightening screams. The engine stopped, the ship stood still. Passageways were filled with terrified, half-dressed people. The *Ville du Havre* had been rammed by an English vessel, the *Lochearn*.

Mrs. Spafford saw three of her children swept away by the sea while she stood clutching the youngest child. Suddenly, she felt her baby torn violently from her arms. She reached out through the water and caught little Tanetta’s gown. For a minute she held her again. Then the cloth wrenched from her hand. She reached out again and touched a man’s leg in corduroy trousers. She became unconscious. She awoke later, finding that she had been rescued by sailors from the *Lochearn*. But her four children were gone.

In the meantime, Horatio Spafford was back in the United States, desperate to receive news of his family. Finally, the blow fell. A cable arrived from Wales stating that the four daughters were lost at sea, but his wife was still alive. He was crushed with what had happened. All night he walked the floor in anguish. Toward the morning he turned to his friend, Major Whittle, and said, "I am glad to trust the Lord when it will cost me something."

On the way across the Atlantic to join his wife, the captain announced that they were now passing the place where the *Ville du Havre* was wrecked. For Horatio Spafford, this was passing through the valley of the shadow of death. He sat down in his cabin on the high seas, near the place where his children perished, and wrote the hymn that would give comfort to so many: "It Is Well with My Soul."

[Q] Why could Horatio Spafford say, "It is well with my soul"? What do stories like this do for our faith?

[Q] What situation in your life do you need God's peace for?

Ask the group to pray for you concerning this area.

—Study by John A. Huffman Jr., with JoHannah Reardon

Galatians: The Fruit of the Spirit - Study 4

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Patience

God wants to make you patient with people and events.

The circumstances of life should not cause us to lose our patience. The Greek word translated as *patience* is *makrothumia*, which is a combination of *makros*, meaning “long,” and *thumos*, meaning “temper.” Paul is exhorting us to be long-tempered.

All of us experience impatience; all of us have experienced the consequences of our impatience; all of us can benefit from becoming more long-tempered through the power of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of this study is to help us understand and demonstrate God’s patience.

Scripture: Galatians 5:22–23

Based on:

“The Fruit of the Spirit: God’s Recipe for a Full Life,” Series Builder by John A. Huffman Jr.

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Read Galatians 5:22–23. The fruit of the Spirit is patience. We have all known moments of impatience. It’s often a feeling of mounting tension and pressure—the feeling that we are going to blow any minute.

John Huffman Jr. shares this story:

A young father in a supermarket was pushing a shopping cart with his little son who was strapped in the front. The little boy was fussing, irritable, and crying. The other shoppers gave him a wide berth, as the child would pull cans off the shelf. The father seemed to be very calm as he continued to push the cart and was murmuring gently, “Easy now, Donald. Keep calm, Donald. Steady boy. It’s all right, Donald.” A mother who was passing by was greatly impressed by this young father’s solicitous attitude. She said, “You certainly know how to talk to an upset child—quietly and gently.” And then bending down to the little boy she said, “What seems to be the trouble, Donald?” “Oh no,” said the father. “He’s Henry. I’m Donald.”

Discussion starters:

[Q] Do you find it harder to be patient with people, circumstances, or things? Why?

[Q] What makes you most impatient?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God wants to make you as patient as He is.

The amazing truth is that God wants to make us as patient as He is. He provides His own Spirit to impart His patience to us. God's patience is long-tempered, or slow to anger, with both believers and unbelievers.

Read Exodus 34:5–7 and 1 Timothy 1:15–16.

[Q] Describe the characteristics of God in the Exodus passage. Which ones relate to His patience? What do qualities like compassion, graciousness, love, and faithfulness have to do with patience?

[Q] How can the Holy Spirit make us more patient? How can we obtain His help? List practical ways.

Admit when we are at the end of our patience and ask Him to give His patience. Confess our inadequacy and trust Him for His point of view concerning this person, circumstance, or thing that is causing us impatience.

[Q] According to the 1 Timothy passage, what is God's attitude toward those who don't believe in Him? What should our attitude be? How can we show his patience to them?
We need to be loving and understanding. If we show impatience for those who have not yet believed, we've forgotten how patient God has been with us.

Teaching point two: God wants to make you patient with Him.

God wants you to be patient with Him. Our impatience toward Him reveals a basic lack of trust that He knows what He's doing. We think, "If he'd just do things my way, it would be all right."

Read Psalm 40:1–3.

[Q] Why do we need to be patient with God? What makes us impatient with Him? What made David patient with Him in Psalm 40?

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) I trust God until things start spinning out of control, then I lose perspective.
- 2) I trust God no matter what my circumstances, because He knows what is best.
- 3) I trust God until He acts in a way I don't understand, and then I'm filled with doubt.
- 4) I trust God knows best for me, but at times that's hard to accept.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? What is the difference between the four positions? How does your position affect the way you live?

[Q] What does impatience with God tell us about our trust in him? How can the Holy Spirit help us to be patient with God?

We admit that we don't know what God is doing, but that we trust the Holy Spirit to calm us and reassure us of God's wisdom and love.

Teaching point three: God wants to make you patient with people.

It helps to remember that we need to be as patient with people as we want them to be with us, or even better, as we want God to be with us. George Sanchez shared this story in "Right Relationships," *Discipleship Journal* (Jan/Feb 1981):

I was visiting my daughter's home when my grandson grabbed my hand to take me to see something. My daughter and he had found an uncracked robin's egg in the backyard. Inside the house they had made a cotton nest under a lamp and placed the egg in it. They found out what the temperature should be and had a thermometer to check it. They were going to watch the egg hatch.

My daughter placed a card in front of this little experiment that said, "Shh, I'm happening!" I thought how good it would be to wear a big sign around me that said, "I'm happening." Every time you looked at me you would say, "George is still happening— he's not there yet, and he's going to have some faults in the process." And if you had your sign on, I would say the same about you. That's forbearance.

Read Matthew 18:23–35.

[Q] What was the point of this story that Jesus told?

[Q] How can remembering how patient God has been with us help us to be patient with other people?

Activity

Purpose: *To demonstrate that God can give us patience.*

Activity: *Name anything that makes them lose their patience. Record these on a whiteboard or poster board under a column labelled Lost Patience. Make a column next to it labelled Patience. What would look like to have patience with the annoying person, circumstance, or thing that you've named.*

Teaching point four: God wants to make you patient with circumstances.

The circumstances of life should not cause us to lose our patience. The Old Testament prophets, early disciples, and Christ all exemplify the patience God wants us to have in our circumstances.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:4–10 and James 5:10–11.

[Q] What kind of circumstances does Paul describe in the Corinthians passage? Have your circumstances ever been this bad? What was his perspective on these circumstances? How do you think he maintained this perspective?

[Q] What does our patience toward circumstances do for other's' faith, as evidenced in the James passage? Can you name someone who has been an example of patience for you? How has that affected you?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

If you allow Him, the Holy Spirit can reshape your character faults into manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit. Amy Carmichael presents a simple plan for curbing our emotions when they threaten to boil over into actions. In the book titled *Edges of His Ways*, she writes the following:

Dr F. B. Meyer once told me that when he was young, he was very irritable, and an old man told him that he had found relief from this very thing by looking up the moment he felt it coming and saying, “Thy sweetness, Lord.” By telling this, that old man greatly helped Dr Meyer, and he told it to tens of thousands.

I pass it on to you because I have found it a certain and a quick way of escape. Take the opposite of your temptation and look up inwardly, naming that opposite; Untruth— Thy truth, Lord; Unkindness—Thy kindness, Lord; Impatience—Thy patience, Lord; Selfishness— Thy unselfishness, Lord; Roughness—Thy gentleness, Lord; Discourtesy— Thy courtesy, Lord; Resentment, inward heat, fuss—Thy sweetness, Lord, Thy calmness, Thy peacefulness

[Q] Why do you think this “quick way of escape” worked for Amy Carmichael? What do you think would best work for you?

[Q] What must change in your attitude so that you will trust God enough to be patient with Him and allow you to be patient with others and circumstances?

Ask the group to pray for you in this area.

—Study by John A. Huffman Jr., with JoHannah Reardon

Galatians: The Fruit of the Spirit - Study 5

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Kindness

Learn to experience and demonstrate God's kindness.

One of Paul's underlying motives in Galatians was to help us become more like Jesus Christ and to help us demonstrate that transformation through specific actions, such as the fruit of the Spirit. One such action is kindness. The early Christians were known, and named, for their kindness, and we should be also.

All of us have demonstrated and received kindness, whether we are Christians or not. However, the kindness of God goes beyond what we are capable of on our own. The purpose of this study is to enlarge our understanding of God's kindness and put it into action.

Scripture: Galatians 5:22–23

Based on:

"The Fruit of the Spirit: God's Recipe for a Full Life," Series Builder by John A. Huffman Jr.

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Read Galatians 5:22–23.

The fruit of the Spirit is kindness. Jesus' life embodied the fruit of the Spirit and is a model for us. The Holy Spirit can produce the same fruit in our lives through the process of sanctification. The kindness of Jesus goes beyond human kindness. Jesus was kind to the "just and the unjust"; his kindness had no limits. In Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul identified several links to God's kindness that help us to display kindness. We'll be discussing those links in this study.

Discussion starters:

[Q] What is the kindest thing anyone has ever done for you? Why was that kindness so powerful to you?

[Q] How has God shown kindness to you?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God's kindness is linked to his truthfulness.

God is truth and when we come into a relationship with Him, we need to let Him build his truth into us. Our lives need to be marked by integrity.

Read Ephesians 4:25.

[Q] What does truth have to do with kindness? Why must we be truthful to be kind?

[Q] What do lies do to our relationships with others? What do lies do to our relationship with God?

[Q] What difference does it make that we are "all members of one body"?

Activity

Purpose: To demonstrate that God's kindness is linked to truthfulness.

Activity: Ask three different people to read each of the case studies below. After each one, discuss how truthfulness would have allowed the person to be kind.

a) Jennifer didn't want her husband to know that she had money problems, so she kept her overdrawn credit cards to herself. When she could no longer get credit, she had to tell her husband. How would telling him sooner have shown him (and herself) kindness?

b) John didn't like confrontation, so he let his friend Bob continue to drink heavily. Finally, Bob's family got fed up and left him. How could John's honesty at an earlier point have been a kindness to Bob?

c) Missy was taught that being submissive to her husband meant never disagreeing with him about anything. Over the years her resentment toward him grew until she despised him. How would gentle honesty about her feelings and opinions have been a kindness to her husband and their marriage?

Teaching point two: God's kindness is linked to His slowness to anger.

Anger short circuits our ability to show kindness to others and is in direct opposition to God's kindness to us.

John Huffman Jr. shares this story, which demonstrates the power of kindness:

Stuart Briscoe tells of one stage in his and Jill's parental pilgrimage when they were dealing with a child who had been showing some signs of teenage discontent that could have blossomed into rebellion. Late one night, Jill was surprised to receive a call from the child in question, who was babysitting for a friend. Jill's immediate maternal response was, "Is everything all right? What's wrong?"

The child said, "Mom, I wanted to call and say I'm sorry for being such a little snot."

"That's great, honey," said Jill, "But what made you call now?"

"I've just been sitting here thinking about you, Mom, and it's your kindness that got to me. The worse I became, the more kind you became."

Read Ephesians 4:26.

[Q] How does checking our temper help us to be kind to others? Why do we get angry with others?

[Q] In what ways do you link God's slowness to anger with His kindness? How do you need to grow in this area?

[Q] How can the Holy Spirit help you to control your anger? Give practical ideas.

As soon as we feel anger rising in us, we need to ask God to control our thoughts and replace the anger with His kindness.

Teaching point three: God's kindness is linked to His desire to be helpful.

We are helpful when we are generous with others, wanting what is best for them.

A good example of this appeared in *USA Today*:

The rarest medal in the Olympics wasn't created from gold, but a bolt.

The story begins on a cold, winter afternoon in Innsbruck at the 1964 Olympic two-man bobsled competition. A British team driven by Tony Nash had just completed its first run, which had put them in second place. Then they made a most disheartening discovery.

They had broken a bolt on the rear axle of their sled, which would put them out of the competition. At the bottom of the hill, the great Italian bobsled driver Eugenio Monti, who was in first place, heard of their plight. Without hesitation, Monti removed the bolt from the rear axle of his own sled and sent it to the top of the hill. The British team affixed it to their sled and then completed their run down the mountain, winning the gold medal. Monti's Italian team took the bronze.

When asked about his act of sportsmanship, Eugenio Monti deflected any praise, saying, "Tony Nash did not win because I gave him a bolt. Tony Nash won because he was the best driver."

The story of Monti's selfless act spread. And because of it he was given the first De Coubertin Medal for sportsmanship. The award, named after the founder of the modern Olympics, is one of the noblest honours that can be bestowed upon an Olympic athlete; in other words, the most precious hardware any Olympian can own. [USA Today (2-17-02); submitted by Marti Pieper on PREACHINGTODAY.COM]

Read Ephesians 4:29–31.

[Q] How do our acts of kindness communicate God's attitude of kindness toward a person?

[Q] To what do you think the "unwholesome talk" in this verse is referring? What does it mean to build "others up according to their needs"?

[Q] Why do you think Paul told us to get rid of all these negative traits in verse 31?

Teaching point four: God's kindness is linked to His compassion and His willingness to forgive.

Compassion is the capacity to feel what others feel and then to do something about it. It also moves us to forgive others because God has forgiven us.

Read Ephesians 4:32 and John 8:1–11.

[Q] Can we be kind without being compassionate? Will it be genuine? Why do we need a heart change of compassion to show true kindness?

[Q] What was Jesus' point in this story from the Gospel of John? What kind of similar situations are you in that require you to show such forgiveness?

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) I forgive those who forgive me.
- 2) I forgive even those who don't forgive me.
- 3) I forgive those who change their behaviour.
- 4) I forgive those who deserve it.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? What is the difference between the four positions? How does your position affect the way you live? Which position reflects the way God deals with you?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

God's kindness is linked to his affirmation of our worth. We are all created in the image of God and are valuable to Him. Psalm 27:10 says, "Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me."

Consider this example from John Huffman Jr.: "One of our Royal Family Kids Camp children, named Eric, had this to say about the help given by St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church and his counsellors Jim Jefferson and Ken Johnson:

The people I am especially thankful for this Thanksgiving are from Royal Family Kids Camp. This camp is for foster children. It teaches that you have a heavenly father who loves you very much. For five days my counsellor Papa Bear Jim and last year Ken helped me become a better person. They acted like they were my dads. They tickled me, played with me, and talked to me.

At the camp I could swim, shoot bows and arrows, build things out of wood, listen to Bible lessons, sing songs, and watch skits. I came home with lots of gifts like a race-car set (for my pretend birthday), shirts, a tape of all the songs, and a photograph album that I look at every night before bed. Next year I get to go for a week again and I'm very thankful that for one week I have a dad."

[Q] Why do we need more than ordinary human kindness toward others?

[Q] Name one area that you'd like to be kinder in.

Ask for the group to pray for you in that area.

—Study by John A. Huffman Jr., with JoHannah Reardon

Galatians: The Fruit of the Spirit - Study 6

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Goodness

What does it mean to be good, and how can we do it?

Goodness is one of the most broadly defined words in the English language. Philosophers have spent a great deal of time defining what it means to be good, and almost every one who does so comes up with a different answer.

The acquisition of knowledge, doing unto others as you would have them do unto you, the greatest benefit for the greatest number, finding pleasure and avoiding pain—all of these are definitions of goodness, but they are all flawed because they are human-centred.

Real goodness is God-centred.

Jesus died so we can be good. This study discusses how the Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to abandon our old lives, adopt a God-centred goodness, and reveal that goodness through actions.

Scripture: Galatians 5:22–23

Based on:

“The Fruit of the Spirit: God’s Recipe for a Full Life,” Series Builder by John A. Huffman Jr.

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Read Galatians 5:22–23.

Secular definitions of goodness are human-centred and following them ultimately produces negative consequences. True goodness is God-centred. It comes from him and is demonstrated through the way we behave. Author J. R. R. Tolkien once wrote in a letter: “No man can estimate what is really happening at the present. All we do know, and that to a large extent by direct experience, is that evil labours with vast power and perpetual success in vain: preparing always only the soil for unexpected good to sprout in” (Chris Armstrong, “9/11, History, and the True Story,” CHRISTIAN HISTORY CONNECTION).

Discussion starters:

[Q] How would you define goodness?

[Q] In what ways is God’s goodness different than our goodness? In what ways is it the same?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God is the source of all goodness and instructs us to be good.

Read Psalm 34:8 and 100:5.

These are just a couple of passages that tell us God is good. In other words, God invented goodness, and He is the one who defines it.

God also tells you and me to be good. However, He must transform us before we can be good.

Read Romans 12:2, 9, and 21.

Defensively, we need to “hate what is evil; cling to what is good” (v.9).

Offensively, we must “overcome evil with good” (v.21) by actively sharing God’s goodness with others.

[Q] How do you determine if someone is good? How can we know God is good? What does His goodness mean to us?

[Q] How can we allow God to transform us into good people (Romans 12:2)?

[Q] What does it mean to hate evil and cling to what is good? Give practical examples.

[Q] How can we overcome evil with good?

Teaching point two: God wants you and me to be like Jesus.

Jesus died so that we could become good and abandon our former life in favour of His example.

In our journey to do this, we need to keep three things in mind.

- a) It is possible to know what is good without doing it.
- b) It is possible to do what is good without being good.
- c) It is possible to live life conflicted between good and evil.

Jesus chastised the religious leaders of his day for being “whitened sepulchres”—clean on the outside but rotten on the inside. Paul struggled with double-mindedness—the conflict between his sinful nature and his spiritual nature.

Read Romans 7:18–24.

[Q] If we are made new in Christ, why do we still struggle with sin?

We are given a new life and a new start, but we still have our old life to contend with. Although our sins are forgiven, we are still sinful beings who must battle our sin nature daily.

[Q] Give an example of something you know is good that you fail to do.

[Q] Give an example of something you have done that was good, even though you knew your motive was poor.

[Q] Which statement best describes you:

- 1) I have no idea what it means to be good.
- 2) I know what it means to be good, but I don’t know how to be good.
- 3) I know God is good and ask Him to work His goodness in me.
- 4) I know God is good and try my best to be like Him.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Only #3 will work. #4 will fail because we are trying to be good in our own efforts, which Paul talked about in Romans 7. How can you get to #3?

Teaching point three: God makes it possible to do and be good.

Both Paul and David were able to grow in God's goodness and demonstrate it by their lives in spite of their struggle against sin.

Read Psalm 51:10, Romans 7:25–8:2 and Titus 3:1–8.

[Q] What was David's prayer in Psalm 51:10, which shows us how we should pray? Why would a pure heart and steadfast spirit be necessary to be good?

[Q] What did Paul say we were set free from in Romans 8:2? How does this freedom enable us to be good?

[Q] What in the Titus passage gives us motivation to be good?

God's kindness, love, and mercy motivate us to please Him. We no longer have to please Him to gain acceptance, but because of His acceptance we want to please Him.

Activity

Purpose: *To demonstrate that God can give us power to be and do good.*

Activity: *Ask the group to list the qualities they think a good person would have. Record these on a whiteboard or poster board. Individually evaluate, in silence, whether you have each of these qualities. Choose a quality that you can ask the group to pray about for you.*

Pray aloud as a group that God would work that quality into yours and others' lives.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

We must choose which definition of goodness we will follow: human- or God-centred. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians have the opportunity to adopt a God-centred goodness and put it into action. If we are transformed in our character, it will show in our actions.

Consider this example by Deann Alford:

In the wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, many stories emerged. Deann Alford reported on one couple who provided ministry in a time of great need. In T-shirts and pyjama bottoms they'd worn for four days and shoes caked in New Orleans sludge, Christopher and Monika Sheppard arrived at Houston's Astrodome. In one arm was a cardboard box that held all they owned that the rising waters didn't snatch before they escaped. In another arm was their 16-month-old son, Jackson, quiet with fever and clutching a baby bottle.

They joined an ever-growing number of those made homeless when levees broke following Hurricane Katrina's rampage through Louisiana. Although the family owned a car, like many residents of the below-sea-level city who weathered the storm in their homes, they stayed because they had no place to go outside New Orleans and thought they could ride it out.

For more than two days they waited with hundreds of other storm survivors as the city around them plunged into bedlam. They ate pilfered food and drank pilfered water that looters unloaded in piles to share.

Finally, the Sheppards were airlifted to a bus that transported them to the Astrodome in Houston, Texas. Though the Astrodome provided shelter and at least some measure of safety compared to the anarchy of apocalyptic New Orleans, the sports arena was tense with dangers and full of vulnerable people, especially the aged.

Hours after the Sheppards arrived, newlyweds Shane and Shelly Cole of Pasadena, Texas, married just nine days, entered the arena. On Wednesday night, the Coles had heard news about problems at the Astrodome. Shane, 35, a Baptist who came to Christ 10 years ago after serving in the first Gulf War, said he grieved for children living amid the Astrodome chaos. The Coles were using just one of their home's two bedrooms and could house a family.

"We've got to go down there," he told Shelly, a Messianic Jew originally from Wisconsin. "I know there's babies in there."

The first two families Shane approached in the Astrodome said loved-ones in Houston were picking them up. Then Shane saw Jackson and asked the Sheppards if they would like to stay with them. They gratefully accepted.

The Coles believe they were just following God's leading. "We were obedient. That's all he required of us," Shelly said. "God will put the puzzle together. We were the link because God works through people. He wants willing vessels." ["I Was a Stranger," www.CHRISTIANITYTODAY.com, (9-8-05)].

[Q] Why can goodness only be demonstrated by our actions?

[Q] How are goodness and obedience linked? Can you be good without being obedient to God? Can you be obedient to God without being good?

[Q] List some opportunities you need to demonstrate God's goodness to those around you.

Ask the group to pray that you will follow through on these opportunities.

—Study by John A. Huffman Jr., with JoHannah Reardon

Galatians: The Fruit of the Spirit - Study 7

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Faithfulness

Faithfulness is an ethical virtue that governs our behaviour.

Faithfulness is not common in our me-first society. The word has been used in the past to describe married couples celebrating their silver and golden wedding anniversaries; however, it is a haunting reality that faithfulness can probably best be described today by the feelings one has for the family dog that dies after 10 or 12 years. The purpose of this study is to help us recognize God's faithfulness and develop a desire to imitate it.

Scripture: Galatians 5:22–23

Based on:

"The Fruit of the Spirit: God's Recipe for a Full Life," Series Builder by John A. Huffman Jr.

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

The seventh fruit of the Spirit comes from the Greek word *pistis*, which can be translated as "faith" or "faithfulness." Faith is a theological virtue and is the basis of belief in God. Faithfulness is an ethical virtue and refers to a quality of reliability and trustworthiness. In 1998, German Theologian Gerd Ludemann renounced Christianity, causing a widespread controversy. "I no longer describe myself as a Christian," said Ludemann, and explained his decision: A Christian is someone who prays to Christ and believes in what is promised by Christian doctrine. So I asked myself: "Do I pray to Jesus, do I pray to the God of the Bible?" And I don't do that.

He went on to declare that Christian descriptions of Jesus as "Lord of the world" were "arrogant and ignore reality." He continued: I don't think Christians know what they mean when they proclaim Christ as Lord of the world. That is a massive claim. If you took that seriously, you would probably have to be a fundamentalist. If you can't be a fundamentalist, then you should give up Christianity for the sake of honesty.

Finally, Ludemann criticized attempts by "liberal theologians" to reinterpret Christian doctrine so that they could continue to describe themselves, in good conscience, as Christian. "They don't [really] believe what the confession of faith says," he said, adding that he found liberal theology "contemptible."

Discussion starters:

[Q] Do you find matters of faith easy or difficult? Why?

[Q] In what area of Christianity do you consider yourself most faithful? Least faithful?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God is faithful.

God has always been faithful to us.

Read Psalm 89:1.

God is faithful to us when we go through painful times of sorrow and loss. For example, the prophet Jeremiah experienced God's faithfulness in the middle of siege-ravaged Jerusalem.

Read Lamentations 3:21–23.

Consider the first verse and refrain of the hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," which comes from this passage:

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with Thee.
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

Refrain:

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy Faithfulness, Lord unto me.

God is also faithful to us in times of temptation.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 and 1 John 1:9.

[Q] What does God's faithfulness mean to you? What quality of His faithfulness is most endearing to you?

[Q] How should the fact that God is faithful affect our attitude? Our behaviour?

[Q] What does it mean that God is faithful to you even when you sin?

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) God is faithful whether I am or not.
- 2) God is not faithful. He has failed me.
- 3) God is faithful to Himself, but not to me.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? What is the difference between the three positions? How does your position affect the way you live?

Activity:

Purpose: *To remind us that God is always faithful.*

Activity: *Ask each person in the group to write out a new verse to the hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." Ask anyone if they'd like to share what they wrote.*

Teaching point two: God calls us to be faithful.

God calls us to be faithful to Him in doctrine, attitude, lifestyle, and through persecution. He also calls us to be faithful to others through our relationships.

Consider this example of faithfulness from The Lord of the Rings: *The Fellowship of the Ring*:

Frodo Baggins (Elijah Wood), a hobbit, is given the unenviable task of destroying a ring in The Cracks of Mount Doom in a dark and evil land called Mordor. His task is fraught with mortal danger. Gandalf, the wizard, understands such a perilous journey could cause anyone to become discouraged. Gandalf encourages Frodo's best friend, Samwise Gamgee (Sean Astin), to accompany Frodo on the trip. In fact, Gandalf makes Samwise promise he will never leave Frodo. Several other brave individuals accompany Frodo as well. These nine travellers become the "Fellowship of the Ring."

Well into the journey, the lives of those in the Fellowship have been endangered on multiple occasions. Concerned for the safety of his friends, Frodo makes a private and noble decision to slip away from his friends and make the remainder of the journey on his own. Frodo steps into a boat and quietly pushes away from the shore.

Suddenly, the branches on the sloping hill above the shore begin to snap and give way to a tiny hobbit warrior. Samwise Gamgee crashes through the branches and onto the shore shouting, "Frodo! Mr. Frodo!"

Frodo yells back, "Go back, Sam! I'm going to Mordor alone!"

Sam is not deterred. He continues toward Frodo, splashing into the river up to his waist.

"Of course you are, and I'm coming with you!"

"You can't swim!" Frodo shouts. "Sam! Sam!"

Sam tries desperately to swim out to the boat. Frodo watches as Sam begins to sink beneath the murky surface of the river.

Frodo reaches down and grabs Sam's wrist, pulling him up and into the boat. Frodo looks at Sam as if to say, "Why? Why would you risk your life attempting to swim out to me?"

A soaking wet Sam sees the question in Frodo's eyes and says, "I made a promise, Mr. Frodo. A promise. 'Don't you leave him, Samwise Gamgee.' And I don't mean to. I don't mean to."

Frodo embraces Sam. "Come on," he smiles.

[The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring (New Line Cinema, 2001), directed by Peter Jackson, based on the novel by J. R. R. Tolkien, screenplay by Frances Walsh; submitted by David Slagle to PREACHINGTODAY.COM]

Read Matthew 23:23 and 3 John 1:1–8.

[Q] In the Matthew passage, Jesus wanted justice, mercy, and faithfulness from the Pharisees. What did they do instead? Why was Jesus not happy about their giving, although it seemed faithful? From this passage, what do you surmise is basic to our being faithful?

[Q] In the 3 John passage, John says to his friend Gaius that it brings him joy to hear of his faithfulness. How was Gaius's faithfulness different than that of the Pharisees? What exactly was Gaius being faithful in?

[Q] How can we be faithful to God? What would that faithfulness look like in your life?

Activity

Purpose: *To demonstrate that God can give us power to be faithful.*

Activity: *Before the group meets, elect someone cut a poster board in the shape of a shield. Ask the group to name any characteristics that exhibit faithfulness to God and write them on the shield with a marker. Discuss how faithfulness becomes a shield in our lives to protect our walk with God.*

Pray together that God would produce those qualities in each person's life.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Are we willing to allow the Holy Spirit to produce faith and faithfulness in our lives? As with all the other fruit of the Spirit, we begin by admitting that we are not faithful in our own power. By being honest with God about our weaknesses, we give Him permission to change us. Ask Him to show you the areas you are not faithful in and to transform your heart.

[Q] Ask each group member to take a moment to think about one area they would like to be more faithful in. Ask them to pray silently confessing their weakness in that area. After a few minutes of silent prayer, encourage each person in the group to ask for prayer in their area of weakness.

Pray aloud together that God would give each person the power to be faithful in this one area.

—Study by John A. Huffman Jr., with JoHannah Reardon

Galatians: The Fruit of the Spirit - Study 8

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Gentleness

The revolutionary power of becoming meek.

In our society, the quality of gentleness, or meekness, has taken on negative connotations. It suggests one who is spineless and spiritless, one who lacks strength and virility. Yet we dare not gloss over this eighth fruit of the Spirit, for without it we can never rise to the kind of existence God created us to experience. The purpose of this study is to give us a proper understanding of gentleness, and how the Holy Spirit can use it to transform our lives. Gentleness revolutionizes our view of how God treats us, how we evaluate ourselves, and how we relate to others.

Scripture: Galatians 5:22–23

Based on:

“The Fruit of the Spirit: God’s Recipe for a Full Life,” Series Builder by John A. Huffman Jr.

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Read Galatians 5:22–23.

The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness. The Greek word translated gentleness, or meekness, is *praotes*, and has two definitions. One refers to the gentleness that comes into the tone of the voice of a lover, words which regularly speak of the power to soothe, to calm, and to bring tranquillity. The second refers to a gentleness of conduct, especially on the part of persons who have it in their power to act otherwise. Gentleness, or meekness, is often viewed as a form of weakness in contemporary society. For example, young boys usually want to emulate star athletes or superheroes, who are generally symbols of power, not gentleness. Paul’s definition of gentleness is positive and describes two qualities: the ability to soothe, and the ability of something powerful to remain under control.

When we begin to understand this concept of gentleness, and as the Holy Spirit grows this fruit in us, our lives become revolutionized.

Discussion starters:

[Q] How would you define gentleness? Can you think of any folklore heroes who are gentle?

[Q] How has God been gentle with you?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Gentleness revolutionizes our view of God and how He treats us.

God’s gentleness is demonstrated when He restrains his power and strength.

Read 1 Kings 19:9–12.

Elijah waited through a powerful wind, an earthquake, and a fire before God spoke to him in a whisper.

Read Philippians 2:5–11.

Jesus modelled gentleness as an appropriate balance between weakness and wrath. In the movie *The Horse Whisperer*, Tom Booker, played by actor Robert Redford, employs his special gift of “gentling” horses. A tense, New York magazine editor can’t believe her eyes as she witnesses the gradual transformation of her daughter’s horse from traumatized to tamed. In one telling scene, the horse, frightened by the editor’s ringing cell phone, gallops off to the far end of a large pasture. Booker walks into the pasture and sits down, where he waits for what appears to be hours. The horse, drawn by its curiosity, inches closer and closer. Finally, it cautiously approaches close enough to touch the “whisperer” and allows itself to be led back to the safety of its stall.

That’s the way it is with God, as he “gentles” the untamed or traumatized people who run from him.

[Q] Have you ever experienced a whisper that was more powerful than an earthquake? Why was it more powerful? Why would God whisper to us instead of shouting?

[Q] What was Jesus’ attitude in the Philippians passage? What did he set aside to come to earth and die for us (v.6)? What did God do as a result (v.9–11)?

[Q] Which of the following statements are true?

- a) God shows gentleness by letting us do what we want.
- b) God shows gentleness by restraining punishment when we deserve it.
- c) God shows gentleness by tolerating sin.

There is a difference between gentleness and weakness. God is gentle, not weak. He will not let us do what we want forever, if what we want is in opposition to Him. Nor will he tolerate wilful sin forever. But in His gentleness, He will refrain from punishing us as we deserve because of Christ’s perfect sacrifice for us.

Teaching point two: Gentleness revolutionizes how we view and evaluate ourselves.

Read Numbers 12.

Moses could have become bitter toward his siblings for their attitude of rebellion, but instead he used gentleness. As Christians, we need to evaluate ourselves based on God’s example of gentleness. Even the way God dealt with this situation was gentle. Rather than removing Miriam from Moses’ presence, He gave her a powerful object lesson for seven days.

Lorraine Hansberry’s play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, is the story of an African American man who makes mistakes that destroy his family’s hopes and dreams. When he confesses and asks for forgiveness, his sister, in great anger, screams at him and calls him despicable names. The mother interrupts her to say, “I thought I taught you to love him.”

The sister shouts back, “Love him? There is nothing left to love.”

The mother replies, “There is always something left to love. And if you ain’t learned that, you ain’t learned nothing. Have you cried for that boy today? I don’t mean for yourself and for the family ‘cause we lost the money. I mean for him; what’s been through and what it done to him.

Child, when do you think is the time to love somebody the most; when they done good and made things easy for everybody? Well then, you ain’t through learning, because that ain’t the time at all. It’s when he’s at his lowest and can’t believe in hisself ‘cause the world done whipped him so. When you starts measuring somebody, measure him right child, measure him right. Make sure you done taken into account what hills and valleys he come through before he go to wherever he is.”

[Q] How do you think Moses’ gentle attitude affected his future relationship with Aaron and Miriam? What might have happened to their relationship if he’d been angry and unforgiving?

[Q] What is the opposite of gentleness? How might those things be destructive?

[Q] How did gentleness affect the way Moses viewed and evaluated himself? If we see ourselves as gentle, how does it affect our actions?

Teaching point three: Gentleness revolutionizes our view of others and how we relate to them.

By allowing God to develop the fruit of gentleness in us, we will be able to treat others more as Jesus would treat them. We will be able to behave gently even toward those who have betrayed or mistreated us.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:6–1

Here Paul compares his behaviour toward the Thessalonians to both a gentle mother and a comforting father.

How can I become gentler?

- 1) I can sincerely want to be gentle.
- 2) I can hang around those who are gentle.
- 3) I can read the Bible to learn what gentleness is.
- 4) I can ask the Holy Spirit to teach me to be gentle.

[Q] How does gentleness communicate love to others?

[Q] Do you see the apostle Paul as weak or strong? Why? What does his gentle behaviour have to do with your view of him?

[Q] How does Paul describe his view of the Thessalonians? Does that view have more to do with their behaviour or his?

Activity

Purpose: *To demonstrate what gentleness looks like.*

Activity: *Read the case studies below. After each one, discuss how this person can demonstrate gentleness.*

- a) *Jeff has a weekly Bible study in his home. His neighbour is angry with him because of all the cars parked around his house.*
- b) *Sarah's co-worker has a vendetta against her. She continually ridicules Sarah and runs her down in front of others.*
- c) *Mark's teenage children are disrespectful toward him.*

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

We must rely on the Holy Spirit to cultivate the fruit of gentleness within us. As with all of the fruit of the Spirit, we cannot simply will these characteristics by our own power. We begin by admitting that we are not gentle enough. We recognize what gentleness is through God's own example and the instruction in his Word, and ask him to begin to point out to us when we are failing to be gentle. We confess that as sin and ask God to change our behaviour into gentleness.

This will require us to be humble and to quickly admit when we are wrong.

[Q] Have you wronged anyone recently by failing to be gentle with them? If so, what can you do to make that relationship better and to display gentleness now?

[Q] Using a separate concordance or one in your study Bible, take time this week to look up all the verses you can find about gentleness. After reading each one, pray that God will work this quality into your life.

—*Study by John A. Huffman Jr., with JoHannah Reardon*

Galatians: The Fruit of the Spirit - Study 9

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Self-Control

Solve the problem of acting like yourself.

Human beings are fallen creatures, which means we have a large potential to become addicted to subhuman, sinful cravings that are destructive to our relationship with ourselves, with God, and with others. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can we die to our sinful nature and live a life fully honouring to God. This study will examine our need for, and the steps to attain, self-control.

Scripture: Galatians 5:22–23

Based on:

“The Fruit of the Spirit: God’s Recipe for a Full Life,” Series Builder by John A. Huffman Jr.

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Read Galatians 5:22–23.

The fruit of the Spirit is self-control. One of Paul’s main themes in his books is the struggle between our human, sinful nature and the godly nature produced in us through the Holy Spirit. This struggle comes to a head with the final fruit of the Spirit: self-control.

Only the Holy Spirit can develop self-control in us.

The big question for all of us is, *Who’s in control of my life?* The fallen state of humanity makes it impossible for us to control our sinful desires. Even the apostle Paul was not able to remain in control of himself at all times (Romans 7:21–25). All of us are caught in a cosmic struggle between our spiritual nature and our sinful nature.

Discussion starter:

[Q] Think of someone whom you think has a great deal of self-control. What is that person like? Is their self-control human or from the Holy Spirit? How can you tell? What difference might it make?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: The solution to the struggle with our sinful nature is a God-controlled life.

All of us possess a sinful nature and have the potential to become completely controlled by it.

Read Galatians 5:16–21.

Bill White tells this story to illustrate the battle that goes on in all of us:

A grandfather was talking to his grandson. “Grandson,” he said, “there are two wolves living in my heart and they are at war with each other. One is vicious and cruel, the other is wise and kind.”

“Grandfather,” said the alarmed grandson, “which one will win?”

The grandfather paused before he said, “The one I feed.”

We can give control of our lives to God only by allowing ourselves, along with our sinful nature, to die.

Read Galatians 2:20 and Romans 6:11–14.

[Q] What are the two warring factors Paul describes in Galatians 5:16–21? How does the Holy Spirit keep us from gratifying the desires of the sinful nature?

[Q] What does it mean to be crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20)? What should that look like in my life? List practical ways. What does faith in the Son of God have to do with it?

To be crucified with Christ means I’ve died to my old life and all its old desires. If that’s true, my life should start to look like Jesus’ life, in my attitude and behaviour. Having faith in the Son of God instead of my own abilities allows me to break through my old sinful ways.

[Q] What does it mean to be dead to sin (Rom. 6:11)? How do we offer the parts of our body to sin (v.13)? To God as instruments of righteousness? What difference does it make that we are under grace (v.14)?

If we are dead to sin, it no longer has a hold on us. We offer the parts of our body to sin when we give into temptation. We offer the parts of our body to God to counteract temptation. Because God has been so gracious to us, we want to please Him by our behaviour.

Teaching point two: The Holy Spirit enables us to accept this solution.

The Holy Spirit provides us with self-control, which allows us to live a life that would otherwise be impossible for us. Most people want self-control but don’t know how to obtain it. The Holy Spirit enables us to gain that control over our lives.

John Beukema shares this illustration of our attitude toward self-control:

On March 10, 2004, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a measure known as the “cheeseburger bill.” The bill is designed to protect the fast food industry from potential lawsuits filed by overweight customers.

Caesar Barber, 56, pointed the finger at McDonald’s, Wendy’s, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Burger King for his two heart attacks, diabetes, and weight problem. Gregory Rhymes, a 15-year-old high school student, joined his mother in blaming fast food restaurants for his obesity. Rhymes’s mother stood before a judge and stated she “always believed McDonald’s was healthy for my son.” Gregory weighs nearly 400 pounds.

The purpose of the “cheeseburger bill” is to stop these kinds of lawsuits. As Representative F. James Sensenbrenner Jr. says, “Don’t run off and file a lawsuit if you are fat. Look in the mirror, because you’re the one to blame.”

Most of us laugh at this blatant attempt to blame others for our lack of self-control, but do we do that in our own way?

Read Hebrews 12:1–4.

[Q] What race is the writer of Hebrews talking about in this passage? How does sin entangle us?

[Q] Why does he tell us to fix our eyes on Jesus (v.2)? Why would that help? According to that verse, why did Jesus endure? How would that keep us from losing heart? What perspective does verse 4 give us?

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) Self-control comes from simply gutting it out.
- 2) Self-control starts in my attitude.
- 3) Self-control must be rooted in an assurance that God knows what’s best for me.
- 4) Self-control is impossible on my own.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? What is the difference between the four positions? How does your position affect the way you live?

Teaching point three: As a result of this solution, we become more like Jesus.

The fruit of the Spirit is singular—all nine are aspects of Jesus’ character and manifest themselves in us through the Holy Spirit. This process starts when we decide to live by the Spirit (justification). This process continues as we walk in the Spirit (sanctification), giving Jesus access to every room in our heart.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8.

[Q] To be sanctified means that we are set apart as holy. How does God do that with our lives? What does a holy life look like? What do holiness and self-control have to do with each other?

[Q] Verse 8 says that if we fail to become holy, we are rejecting God. It also says God gives us his Holy Spirit. How does this make holiness possible?

Activity

Purpose: *To demonstrate that God can give us self-control.*

Activity: *Divide the group in smaller groups of three or four. Give each group a magazine that contains a lot of ads. Ask them to find an ad that represents a lack of self-control and to share how they would gain self-control over that area through the power of the Holy Spirit.*

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Salvation through Jesus Christ is the only way to allow God's Holy Spirit to grow His fruit in your life. Only as we freely admit that we cannot maintain a lasting self-control on our own will we be able to tap into God's self-control through the Holy Spirit.

As in all the fruit of the Spirit, we ask Him to replace our feeble efforts with His perfect control. Self-control is only possible through the Spirit's control.

[Q] Are you a self-controlled person naturally? Why might this not be enough in the Christian life? What if you are not naturally self-controlled? Is there hope for you?

[Q] Does it depend on you or on God?

Mention to the group one area in which you lack self-control.

Ask the group to pray for you in this area.

—Study by John A. Huffman Jr., with JoHannah Reardon