

Fruit of the Spirit

by Pastor James Aderman

LOVE

Love -- God's way

God's love is an unconditional, unbreakable commitment to do whatever is for our benefit, regardless of cost.

Love, our culture says, is the raw passion that drives a man and woman into each other's arms. It's the giddy rush of soulmates intoxicated with each other. Love is emotional fireworks and a starry-eyed gaze, a mind overpowered with thoughts of its beloved. True love does have an exhilarating side. But the exhilaration is not love; it is the result of love. Real love is not a feeling. It is an action, a commitment to appreciate and affirm others, to serve and sacrifice for them. This is the love the Holy Spirit empowers within every Christian. It is part of his fruit in our lives. It is an extension of God's love and works like God's love.

God loves us

For example, God did not love Old Testament Israel because the people had won his heart. He remained faithful because of his covenant, his commitment to them. He remained faithful despite their ungrateful response to his love. Is there a more striking picture of that commitment than the marriage vows he commanded Hosea to live out? "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods" (Hosea 3:1).

Commitment as the basis for love is essential to the New Testament word agape. God did not feel an emotional high when he "so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." He felt no fireworks, had no stars in his eyes, experienced no giddiness. But he loved. God's love is an unconditional, unbreakable commitment to do whatever is for our benefit, regardless of cost. Even the sacrifice of his Son. His commitment doesn't flag because we fail to love in kind. His commitment goes beyond desire to action. His is an astounding love, an unimaginable love! Luther said of God's grace, "Such is its magnitude that if anyone were able to comprehend it . . . a joy so great would come to us from this recognition that we would promptly die because of it."

God empowers us to love

When the Holy Spirit created faith in Jesus in our hearts, he moved into our lives with this love. Now the Spirit urges us to love as we've been loved, not only those who love us back, but those who annoy us or even wish to destroy us. He teaches us to love without condition or repayment. The Spirit reveals that real love is patient and kind; devoid of envy, boasting, and pride; refuses to be rude, self-seeking, and easily angered; keeps no record of wrongs; declines to delight in evil but rejoices with the truth; always protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres; and never fails (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

Much more than teaching about love, the Spirit empowers us to love. That's essential. If love is to be love, it must express itself. The Spirit provides the strength to love God's way, strength to overcome our selfish unwillingness to love. The same force that brought the Spirit into our hearts continues its powerful work.

That's why the Spirit can command, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (EPH 5:1-2).

For personal study

- Look for evidence in Abraham's life that God's love for his people was based on his covenant, not emotion (Genesis 12-25).
- Read 1 John 4:7-21. What's the relationship between God's love and our love for others?
- Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 in several translations. Write your own commentary. How might you better show love?
- Family project: View a television program together. Evaluate its definition of love against God's.

Joy

The fruit of the Spirit is joy

The Spirit's assurance of God's gracious commitment brings joy in the face of persecution, pain, heartache, injustice. Christians are joyful. Our lives brim with joy as the Spirit fills our soul with Jesus' gospel. The presence of the Spirit guarantees our joy. The Spirit teaches, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Since our relationship with God is secure, what could rob us of our joy? God is for us, who can be against us?

Finding joy in every situation

Christians view life optimistically because "in all . . . things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." The Spirit empowers Christians to move beyond the smile of a positive attitude. He leads believers to

rejoice because of the assurance that nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:1, 31-39).

Joy accompanies the presence of the Spirit because the Spirit leads us to see life through God's eyes. Our joy is built on the assurance that God loves us and does what is best for us. Christians find joy in every situation. Their loving Father is in total control. He has designed the circumstance, allowed it, tempered, and timed it. The Spirit's assurance of God's gracious commitment brings joy in the face of persecution, pain, heartache, injustice. So an imprisoned apostle can write, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). James encourages, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds . . ." (James 1:2). And Peter encourages, "In [your hope in Christ] you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials" (1 Peter 1:6).

Finding joy through the Word

Our journey into heaven's eternal joy is not intended to be a humorless wake. It is a triumphal march of glad celebration. Jesus has won; we have won. He reigns without equal; we are secure. He transforms bad into benefit; we are blessed. Our joy depends on God's Word. Luther wrote, "I still constantly find that when I am without the Word, Christ is gone, yes, and so are joy and the Spirit. But as soon as I look at the psalm or a passage of Scripture, it so shines and burns into my heart that I gain a different spirit and mind."

The Spirit works on us through his Word to empower his joy to smile within us. "The precepts of the Lord are right," he says, "giving joy to the heart" (Psalm 19:8). Joy is the result of trusting God's loving will. Jesus is the proof of God's love and power. The Spirit keeps us focused on Jesus, and so the fruit of the Spirit is joy.

For personal study

- Read Psalm 68. Note how the psalmist points to God's sovereignty and love as the basis for joy.
- Peter points us to God's salvation in Jesus Christ as the source of joy in the face of trials (1 Peter 1:2-10). What does he say God wants to accomplish by sending trials? What advice do you find there for facing trials in your life?

Peace

The fruit of the Spirit is peace

"Peace be with you" takes on extraordinary depth when it's a reminder of the peace the Spirit gives us in Jesus. Eden is the fragrance of the fruit of the Spirit. In that idyllic garden, there was no fear because there was no sin. There were no crushing disappointments or failures. God was at one with man and woman, and they with him. The fruit of the Spirit is Eden's peace. Peace is the state God created and sin destroyed. It's the condition Jesus restored to believers through his death on the cross.

The blessings of peace

When the Spirit brought us to faith, he connected us with the peace Jesus won. "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Additional blessings attach themselves to that peace. "The peace of God . . . will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20). Through the Spirit we are able to "let the peace of Christ rule in [our] hearts" (Colossians 3:15), for "the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). In gratitude we "make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him" (2 Peter 3:14).

Flowing from Jesus' peace is Eden's security, safety, calmness. What can possibly go wrong when the God of peace is with you? Regardless of circumstances, we can say, "I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:8). Hope is also ours. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

And knowing what peace is, we find a much richer meaning in God's promise to Abraham and all believers, "You . . . will go to your fathers in peace" (Genesis 15:15).

Peacemakers

As the Spirit's peace takes over our lives, it reminds us we are called to live in peace. We are compelled to be those blessed peacemakers who "will be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9), "peacemakers who sow in peace [and] raise a harvest of righteousness" (James 3:18).

We work for oneness in faith with all Christians, "mak(ing) every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Even an ordinary greeting "Peace be with you" takes on extraordinary depth when it's a reminder of the peace the Spirit gives us in Jesus. The sweet fruit of the Spirit is peace. "The Lord bless you and . . . give you peace."

For personal study

- Jesus said his peace is not the same as the world's (John 14:27). Describe the difference.
- Read Romans 5:1-5. As a result of our peace with God, what other blessings do we inherit?

- Where in your life is God calling you to exercise more fully the peace he's given you?

Patience

The fruit of the Spirit is patience

Patience is loving others so much that we endure their faults. Throughout his life Paul marveled at God's patience. "I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man," he confessed. "For that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience" (1TI 1:13, 16).

God's astounding patience! Long after humans have given up on incorrigible degenerates, the Lord continues to reach out to them. Christians can find that patience hard to understand. "Lord, how could you let Jeffrey Dahmer live long enough to confess faith in Jesus?"

God's patience prompts patience

I wonder how many first-century believers asked God to destroy Saul the Christian-hunter. But the Lord is patient, "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. . . . Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation" (2 Peter 3:9, 15).

God's patience with Paul prompted patience in Paul, so Paul could say, "You . . . know all about my teaching, my way of life, my . . . patience" (2 Timothy 3:10). He urged, "Be patient with everyone" (1 Thessalonians 5:14). He prayed that believers would live "strengthened with all power . . . so that [they] may have great endurance and patience . . ." (Colossians 1:2). He commanded Pastor Timothy, "Correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:11).

Patience defined

The word Paul uses to describe this evidence of the Spirit's presence in our lives is the opposite of anger. The King James Version captured the sense of the Greek word with the translation "longsuffering." Paul defines this patience. "Be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2). Patience is loving others so much that we endure their faults. Patience is a quality we, by faith, put on. "As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with . . . patience" (Colossians 3:12).

Patience comes with faith

Every Christian has patience. It comes as standard equipment along with faith in Jesus. So there is no need to pray for more patience; our petitions are for fuller use of the patience the Spirit has already given us. We use the patience we have received to thank God for his patience. We clothe ourselves with patience because we are God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved.

For personal study

- Think about 1 Timothy 1:13-16. In what ways must you echo Paul's description of himself as a sinner? How is it a comfort to you that Paul, "the worst of sinners," was shown "unlimited patience"?
- Read Jesus' parable about the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:23ff). In which of your relationships have you acted the part of the unmerciful servant? Jesus has forgiven you for that. When will you apologize to him and the person(s) with whom you were impatient?

Kindness

The fruit of the Spirit is kindness

>When the Spirit creates faith in our hearts and moves in, he . . . empowers us to show his kindness in our relationships.

"The fruit of the Spirit is . . . *chrestotays*." Before you grab your Webster's, *chrestotays* is a New Testament Greek word, regularly rendered *kindness*. That's a good translation. *Kindness* describes someone who is sympathetic, friendly, gentle, tender-hearted, and generous. But *chrestotays* is more than *kindness*. *Chrestotays* describes a relationship how a person or thing fits with someone or something else. It pictures a connection that is comfortable, wholesome, beneficial, useful. Jesus uses the word in that sense when he invites us, "Take my yoke upon you. . . . For my yoke is *easy*" (Matthew 11:29,30). Trusting Jesus puts us in a relationship with him that fits, that has an at-home feel.

In the New Testament, heads of state and masters of slaves who are gentle, caring, and friendly toward those under them are *chrestotays*. That's God's relationship with us. "You have tasted that the Lord is *good*," testifies 1 Peter 2:3. Paul assures the Romans, "God's *kindness* leads you toward repentance." Paul links God's *chrestotays* and love together in Titus 3 :4, "When the *kindness* and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us." In Ephesians 2:7 the apostle points to Jesus as the evidence of the Father's *chrestotays*, "God raised us up with Christ . . . in order that he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his *kindness* to us in Christ Jesus."

Everyone has a favorite pair of pants or shoes or a shirt. It makes no difference if the style is outdated, the shoes have wearholes, or the shirt is irretrievably soiled. They are *chrestotays*: they feel good, they fit right, they're comfortable. That describes this characteristic of God, a characteristic the Spirit shares with every believer. When the Spirit creates faith in our hearts and moves in, he brings along his *chrestotays* and empowers us to show his *kindness* in our relationships. He commands us, "Be *kind* and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (EPH 4:32). It comes as no surprise to learn that "love is . . . *kind*" (1 CO 13:4).

A husband complained that his wife was unappreciative of his love. He regularly took his kids to the park to get them out of the house and give his wife a break. The problem was--his wife didn't want to be left alone. She wanted help getting the housework and laundry done. The husband was trying to be loving, but he wasn't showing *chrestotays*, a *kindness* that fit the situation, that was useful. Our *chrestotays* will demonstrate itself in useful acts.

The sensitivity required for *chrestotays* already belongs to us. It is part of the fruit of the Spirit's presence in our lives. The Spirit supplies it as freely as he provides forgiveness in Jesus. We live out his *chrestotays* in thanks for his *kindness* to us.

For personal study

- God is *chrestotays*. Identify situations where that especially shows through in his relationship with Bible characters. In his relationship with you.
- Make a list. How will *chrestotays* show in your relationship with each person God put in your life?

Goodness

The fruit of the Spirit is goodness

It is in imitating God's goodness that we show we belong to him..

"Every good tree bears good fruit. . . . A good tree cannot bear bad fruit" (Matthew 7:17,18). No tree produces fruit that is contrary to its nature. Apple trees must produce apples. This truth applies to goodness<whatever is good by nature will produce good results. It can't do otherwise.

God is good. He is the source of whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy. We judge goodness with him as the standard. "No one is good," Jesus says, "except God alone" (Mark 10:17,18). Like Jesus' good tree, God only bears good fruit.

Proof of God's goodness

The ultimate proof and guarantee of God's goodness is that he "wants all men to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4). It's astounding he gave his Son to accomplish that. A hallmark of God's goodness is its relentless desire to benefit his creation. Because he is good, he gives us "every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17) and "in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28). And since God's goodness never wavers we are "confident of this, that he who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

Imitating God's goodness

The Spirit brought his goodness when he entered our hearts. Now his goodness reproduces its fruit in us. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). It is in imitating God's goodness--a goodness that searches out ways to benefit others--that we show we belong to him. "Anyone who does what is good is from God" (3 John 11).

Taste the sweet fruit of goodness on our branches--savor its form.

- We "cling to what is good" (Romans 12:9) and "overcome evil with good" (21).]
- We "please [our] neighbor for his good, to build him up" (Romans 15:2).
- We "want . . . to be wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil" (Romans 16: 19).
- We trust, "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8).
- We "do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). We "do not let any unwholesome talk come out of (our) mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Ephesians 4:29).

The Spirit of goodness has transformed us through Jesus into good trees that bear good fruit. It can't be otherwise. He lives within us.

For personal study

- God is incapable of doing anything less than good for us. How does that comfort you? Encourage you? Urge you to trust him?
- Look again at the list of ways goodness shows its fruit in our lives. Think of a real life situation for each item and how you would show goodness.

Faithfulness

The fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness

The Savior guarantees that God faithfully forgives the penitent.

Her body was beautifully dressed and laid in a rich casket, but her skin was sickly yellow brown. This formerly lovely, 30-something woman literally drank herself to death. Melissa grew up in my congregation. But the lure of alcohol and then drugs seduced her out of a marriage, motherhood, steady employment, health, and the church. We had occasional contact over the years, mostly when she was hospitalized with a failing liver. I talked to her days before she died. She was jaundiced and weak, but eager to talk. She admitted she made a mess of her life; she spoke openly about her health and dying.

"Melissa," I asked, "if you were to die, do you know where you'd be?" "Heaven. I'd be in heaven."

"How can you be sure of that?" I probed.

Her confident answer, "Because Jesus forgave my sins."

Like the prodigal son's father, God remained faithful to Melissa though she "squandered [her] wealth in wild living." He refused to cancel his baptism covenant. He nursed her faith. He welcomed her home. "If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Timothy 2:12-13).

God's faithfulness is evident

No less than 11 times in the New Testament (more than 30 in the Old) God is called faithful. We see his faithfulness at Jesus' cross and empty tomb. The Savior guarantees that God faithfully forgives the penitent, protects us, defends us. He never flinches, "Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35-39).

Imitators of God's faithfulness

We are not just recipients of God's faithfulness; we are imitators. Inseparably attached to faith in Jesus is the Spirit's reliability and fidelity. He hasn't only promised, "Be faithful . . . and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10); he has empowered to us to faithfulness. Being made faithful to God, we become faithful in relationships. Christian husbands live as the Christ-figure in their homes; wives as a picture of the church. Believing parents are able to be as patient and forgiving as our Father was to Melissa. Christian children faithfully obey their parents.

The strength to practice the Spirit's faithfulness is in our possession; it's part of the new person we are in Christ. We not only enjoy our Father's faithfulness. We enjoy being faithful like our Father. We are positioned as the "faithful servant" who hears his master's commendation, "Well done!" (Matthew 25:21). "The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

For personal study

- Examples of God's faithfulness are mentioned above. List other references by checking a concordance under "faithful." When do you especially need assurance of the Lord's faithfulness?
- List commitments you are tempted to neglect. The Spirit's faithfulness lives within you along with your faith in Jesus. How does that bolster you to fulfill those commitments?

Gentleness

The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness

A Christian's gentleness finds its energy in living to please God.

No single English word fully translates Paul's term for gentleness in Galatians 5:23. The Greek word, too, might be misunderstood. The Spirit's gift of gentleness extends beyond the word's normal meaning in both languages. The Greek word for gentleness is also rendered mildness, meekness, considerateness, or courteousness. Its opposite is anger, cruelty, fierceness, self-interest, and self-assertiveness. The problem for Paul's day was the Greek word only described how people behaved toward each other, never toward God. It described their conduct, not their attitude. Worse, it might imply condescension and self-interest. A king who curried the favor of his people (not because he loved them, but because he wanted to manipulate them--was called gentle.

Gentleness lives to please God

New Testament gentleness is much different. Christian gentleness is a reflection of God's loving relationship with the believer. It doesn't hint at condescension. It testifies about humble submission to a loving Father's will. Paul's word never includes selfish manipulation. A Christian's gentleness finds its energy in living to please God. Our English word gentleness must stretch for an adequate translation. A gentle child of God is not weak, spineless, or timid. Like the Savior, God's child is open, caring, and sensitive--first toward the Lord, then toward others.

Jesus called himself "gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29). We see that when, praying in Gethsemane, he bowed to his Father's will. Jesus' gentleness was apparent when he dealt with Lazarus' grieving sisters and a repentant Peter. Jesus was meek and considerate, but never weak-kneed and vacillating.

Gentleness doesn't lack courage

Our word must stretch in another way. Often people are mild-mannered because they lack courage. Jesus' gentleness didn't spring from cowardice but from the infinite resources of God he had at his disposal. For him "equality with God [was not] something to be grasped" (Philippians 2:6). His lofty position gave him the courage to always be kind. Even when the Lord drove money changers from his temple, boldly faced his accusers, and resolutely marched on to the hell of the cross, he acted in biblical gentleness.

Our gentleness also flows from our lofty position. We are the children of God. The sovereign Lord of the universe caringly controls every event for our benefit, so we humbly accept our Father's dealings with us--including the painful experiences. When others harm us, our gentleness allows us to bear the injustice. Our Father permits those sins to chasten and purify us. Out of a gentle spirit, the Christian forgives the wrong and seeks reconciliation.

The Spirit's virtue of gentleness includes much more than we'd normally assign that word--in Greek as well as English. But with the infinite Spirit living inside us, we can expect his fruit will always be far above normal.

For further study

- Write the definition of biblical gentleness in your own words. Page through the Gospels looking for examples of Jesus at his gentle best.
- Read about your lofty position in Christ in Ephesians 2:4-10 and 1 Peter 2:9,10. How will focusing on that enable you to be gentle when your life is in upheaval?

Self-control

The fruit of the Spirit is self-control

Self-control shows itself as the grateful saint does what is unnatural for humans.

"When other people's alarm clocks start ringing, they are already working at the gym," a 1992 Newsweek article on Olympic athletes reported. "Their concentration is total, even at this early hour. Over and over, they twist and turn their bodies, making sure that each muscle knows exactly what to do. After practicing, they might head off for a few hours of school; then it's back to the gym for an afternoon-into-evening session. And that's in the off-season."

A response requiring training

Olympic training is not easy. It never was. Two thousand years ago, Olympic candidates trained for 10 months. Epictetus, a first century Greek philosopher, said to the Olympians, "You must be orderly, living on spare food; abstain from the confections; make a point of exercising at the appointed time, in heat and in cold; nor drink cold water nor wine." These athletes showed self-control.

A person in charge of his actions has self-control. An athlete may feel like breaking curfew, quitting the team, skipping drills, but he won't allow those options. The Greek word goes below actions to attitude. Spirit-produced self-control describes a person so (literally) "in a position of power over" himself that he doesn't even think about having options.

A response to God's grace

Self-control is the believer's response to God's grace. It's the attitude that grows the more the believer recognizes Jesus "died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Luther says, "This [word] refers to sobriety, temperance, or moderation in every walk of life. Paul contrasts it with the works of the flesh. He wants Christians to live a chaste and sober life; not to be adulterers, immoral, or lustful persons; to marry if they cannot live chastely; not to be contentious; not to go to court, etc.; not to be drunken, not to be addicted to intoxication; but to abstain from all these things."

A response aided by the Spirit

Self-control shows itself as the grateful saint does what is unnatural for humans. A Christian doesn't lack in zeal, is joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. He blesses, rather than curses, those who persecute him. He is careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. He does not take revenge. He overcomes evil with good. Self-control takes more than an Olympian's determination. It takes the Spirit's power, power he shares with every believer from the moment he brings souls to faith. Because the Spirit lives within, believers are capable of Olympian-like self-control in life's race toward glory.

For personal study

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Paul compares Christians to athletes, who go into "strict training [i.e., practice 'self-control'] . . . to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever."

- How do we know Paul is not saying our self-control earns the crown? (cf. Philippians 3:12 & 2 Timothy 1:8-12)
- What prompts us to run the race of life in strict training?
- Where does the Spirit's self-control most clearly show itself in your life? Where is it most obscured?