
The Fruit of the Spirit:
Living in Christ's Overflowing Abundance
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The Fruit of the Spirit:

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Dr. Matthew Webster

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Chapter 1

The Abundance of the Spirit



1

¹Dietrich Moravec.

The moment you put your faith in Jesus Christ you became a new you. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here" (2 Corinthians 5:17)! This new you has a completely new heart and a brand new nature. Ezekiel 36:26-27 says: "I will give you a new heart and put a new Spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws." We know that in Christ we have the Holy Spirit (see Romans 8:9,11, 1 Corinthians 6:19, 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, Ephesians 1:13-14, Galatians 4:6, John 14:17, Acts 2:38) and so we know we have been given a new heart and a brand new life.

If you have not yet received Jesus as your Savior, I invite you to do so right now. Salvation in Christ begins with the acknowledgment that you are a sinner in need of His grace and place your faith in His finished work on the cross to atone for your sins (Romans 5:22, 1 John 2:2). The Bible says in Romans 10:9-10, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."

If this truth of Scripture is resonating with your Spirit that means the power of the Holy Spirit is at work within you and you are at a place where you are receptive to God's grace. So, let's pray together:

"Dear Heavenly Father, I thank You for Your incredible love for me displayed by sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross for all my sins. I acknowledge that I am a sinner in need of Your grace. I believe that Your Son

Jesus died for my sins and rose again. His precious blood washes me clean of all my sins. I rejoice that all my sins are forgiven because Jesus took them all upon Himself at the cross and that I am made righteous through His sacrifice for me. So, I thank You Father God that I am no longer under judgment but embraced by Your grace. I believe that when Jesus rose on the third day, He conquered death. My faith in Jesus grants me everlasting life. I thank you for the gift of Your Holy Spirit that empowers me to live for You and He will guide me in Your truth. Thank You for Your love and for the new life I have in Jesus, a life where all the Fruit of the Spirit will be born. I rejoice in the promise that Your goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life because I am Your beloved child. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen."

Once you place your faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit now dwells within you, and you will begin to experience the transformation that only He can bring. You will not walk alone; God will be with you every step of the way, teaching you, guiding you, and helping you to live out the beautiful Fruit of the Spirit.

It is also important to get connected with a group of believers as Hebrews 10:25 says, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching." I want to invite you to join us for live worship at Acts 433 Church (www.acts433.com) until you find a church home. God will lead you to the right church where you will be blessed to use the spiritual gifts God has blessed you with to build the Kingdom of God and edify and encourage other brothers and sisters in Christ as you grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

New Life in Christ

Our new lives in Christ are marked by:

1. Forgiveness of Sins

Through Jesus' sacrifice, our sins are forgiven, and we are reconciled to God. This is a primary spiritual benefit we receive in Christ.

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

2. Righteousness

In Christ, we are declared righteous. This righteousness is not our own but is the righteousness of Christ that has been credited to us often referred to as the "imputed righteousness of Christ".

Dikaiosynē is derived from the word dikaios (*δίκαιος*), which means just, righteous, or upright. The suffix -synē (*-σύνη*) denotes a quality or state. So, dikaiosynē means "the state or quality of being righteous".² This is what we are in Christ forever.

☐ Romans 3:22 – "This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile."

☐ Philippians 3:9 – "And be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith."

The New Testament emphasizes that Christ is the source of righteousness for believers. Through Him,

²www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1343/kjv/tr/0-1/

Christians are made right with God, and they are empowered to live righteous lives, not by their own strength but by the work of the Holy Spirit.

- 1 Corinthians 1:30 – “It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.”

3. Eternal Life

Eternal life is a gift given to believers in Jesus. It’s a promise that begins now through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and continues forever in the presence of God.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

4. Grace

Grace is unmerited favor from God, and in Christ, we receive this grace abundantly. It is God’s kindness, and blessing, and is essential for us to continue in His grace as we receive it by faith every day and in many ways. We don’t deserve God’s grace and we can never earn it.

“For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17)!

“Out of His fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given” (John 1:16).

5. Peace with God

Through Jesus, we are no longer enemies of God but have peace with Him. This peace comes through Christ's atoning sacrifice and assures us of God's love and favor.

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

6. Adoption as Children of God

Through Jesus, we are adopted into God's family as His children, with all the rights and privileges that entails.

"To redeem those under the Law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are His sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are His child, God has made you also an heir" (Galatians 4:5-7).

7. New Identity in Christ

In Christ, we receive a new identity. We are no longer defined by our old sinful nature but are made new and given a new purpose and can live by the Spirit.

Romans 8:1-4 speaks of how, in Christ, we are no longer condemned but empowered to live according to the Spirit, reflecting the transformation of our identity in Him.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the Law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of

sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1-4).

8. Victory Over Sin and Death

Through Jesus’ death and Resurrection, we have victory over sin and death. The power of sin no longer reigns over us, and we are no longer slaves to it.

“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

9. Inheritance in Christ

Believers have an inheritance as children of God, which is imperishable and kept in Heaven for us. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in Heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4).

“But our citizenship is in Heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20).

10. The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is given to believers as a “deposit” guaranteeing their inheritance in Christ. The Spirit dwells in us, empowering us to live according to God’s will.

These spiritual blessings—righteousness, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, eternal life, grace, peace, adoption,

and more—are all deposited into the believer’s spiritual account because of Jesus’ death and Resurrection. Through Him, we receive every blessing needed to live a godly life, both in this world and in the world to come.

The Holy Spirit, given to every believer, is not only the seal and guarantee of our eternal inheritance, but He also plays a pivotal role in shaping our character and empowering us to live according to God’s will. As we yield to the Spirit’s guidance, He works in us, producing in our lives the visible evidence of His presence—the “Fruit of the Spirit”. These virtues are the natural outflow of a life transformed by God’s grace, reflecting the character of Christ in practical, everyday ways.

Overview of the Fruit of the Spirit

In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul describes the fruit that the Holy Spirit cultivates in the lives of believers. These traits not only mark our new identity in Christ, but they also serve as a testimony to the world of God’s work in us. Let’s take a closer look at these nine virtues that reflect the heart and life of a believer empowered by the Holy Spirit. Interestingly enough nine in Hebrew “tehshah” is the last and largest single digit and it represents harvest and fruitfulness.³

The Bible speaks of the powerful transformation that takes place in a believer’s life through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul outlines the “Fruit of the Spirit”—qualities that are birthed in us as we walk in step with the Spirit. These qualities—love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness,

³K. Gallagher. Grace in Torah. Hebrew Numbers 1-10. June 15, 2015. www.graceintorah.net/2015/06/15/hebrew-numbers-1-10/

faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—are not merely behavioral changes, but evidence of a deeper, spiritual reality: Christ Himself living in and through us.

In Galatians 2:20, Paul beautifully expresses this reality: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

This verse reveals the heart of the Christian life: “Christ in us”. It is no longer our efforts or striving that produce godly fruit, but Christ, by His Spirit, working within us to bring about transformation.

For instance, love—the first and most essential fruit—is not something we can generate on our own. It is Christ in us who is love (1 John 4:8), and as we abide in Him, His love flows through us. As Galatians 2:20 says, “Christ lives in me.” It’s His love, His patience, and His kindness, that takes root in our hearts and is made manifest in our actions.

Similarly, when we look at patience or kindness, these are not merely virtues that we strive to develop on our own; they are the character of Christ Himself. Christ in us is patient. Christ in us is kind. His patience and kindness are perfected in our weakness. As 2 Corinthians 12:9 reminds us, “But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’” It is in recognizing that apart from Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5), and in our weakness, His power is made evident.

How is the Fruit of the Spirit Produced?

The Fruit of the Spirit which is cultivated by the Holy Spirit is made possible through our union with Christ. In John 15, Jesus describes this vital connection:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Jesus is the source of all spiritual fruit. Just as a branch draws its life and nourishment from the vine, we draw our life and strength from Christ. When we abide in Him—remaining in close fellowship with Him, depending on His power, depending on His love and His grace—we naturally bear the Fruit of the Spirit. It is not a matter of effort or discipline alone, but of intimate, abiding union with Christ, who empowers us to reflect His nature in the world.

In this way, the Fruit of the Spirit is not a list of moral behaviors we must achieve through willpower. It is the manifestation of Christ’s life in us, transforming us from the inside out. As we are united with Him, His character is increasingly reflected in our own lives, enabling us to live with the same love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control that He embodies.

The Connection Between Spiritual Growth and Abundance in Life

As we allow Christ to live in and through us, the Fruit of the Spirit naturally begins to flourish in our lives. This transformation, rooted in our union with Christ, is not just about moral improvement or achieving virtuous behavior. It is about experiencing true spiritual growth, which leads to a life marked by abundance —abundance not just in the quantity of our

blessings, but in the quality of our relationship with God and with others.

In John 15:8, Jesus teaches, “This is to My Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples.”

As we grow in Christ, bearing fruit in keeping with the Spirit, we not only bring glory to God, but we also experience the fullness of life that He promises. Spiritual growth in Christ—through abiding in Him and walking in the Spirit—leads to an abundant life, overflowing with His peace, joy, and love, which the world cannot offer.

This abundance is not merely external prosperity or the absence of trouble, but a deep, inner richness that transcends circumstances. Jesus described this kind of abundance in John 10:10 when He said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

This is the life He offers: a life that is full, rich, and overflowing—marked by spiritual growth, eternal perspective, and an ever-deepening intimacy with God.

As we continue to grow in the Spirit and experience His transformative work in our lives, we are invited into a life that is not only abundant in blessing but also full of purpose, as we reflect the character of Christ to the world around us. This spiritual growth—and the abundance that comes with it—flows from our ongoing relationship with Jesus, the true Vine, who nurtures and sustains us.

Cultivating Abundance: Practical Steps to Growth

As we reflect on the abundant life that comes from our union with Christ, it becomes clear that spiritual

growth is not something that happens automatically. While it is true that Christ is the source of our growth and fruitfulness, we are still called to actively participate in the process. Just as a garden requires both the sun's nourishment and the gardener's care, our spiritual growth requires our intentional effort to receive nourishment from the Son.

In John 15:2, Jesus says, "He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

This process of pruning and cultivating requires our cooperation with God's work in our lives. We must actively create space for God to grow us, shape us, and refine us into the image of Christ through time spent with Him. The abundant life that Jesus promises is not a passive experience; it involves intentional time spent with Jesus that matures us in our faith.

So, how do we cultivate this abundance? What are the practical steps we can take to foster growth in our walk with Christ? Let's explore some intentional practices that help us grow in the Spirit and experience the fullness of life that Christ has for us.

As we reflect on the Fruit of the Spirit, we recognize that these characteristics are not just nice ideals we strive for, but the very essence of Christ's nature living within us. When we feel like we're falling short—whether it's in patience, kindness, or any of the other fruits—we must remember that it's not our effort but Christ in us that enables us to bear fruit. I've had moments, like when I was in public and my child decided to throw a tantrum in the middle of the grocery store aisle and I didn't feel very patient. In those moments, it's easy to forget that patience isn't

just something I need to manufacture. Patient is who I am at my core because Christ lives in me. Even when I don't feel it, Christ's patience flows through me, empowering me to handle the situation with His grace. His grace is especially what I need in trying times.

So, how can you allow Christ to express His patience through you in those moments?

1. Acknowledge His Presence in You

The first step is simply to remember that Christ lives in you. Colossians 1:27 reminds us that "Christ in you, the hope of glory." You are never alone in those trying moments, and His patience is already within you, ready to be released. In those stressful situations, you are connected to the Vine—Christ Himself—and His patience will naturally flow through you if you remain in Him.

2. Rely on the Holy Spirit's Strength

Instead of trying to summon patience on your own, ask the Holy Spirit to empower you in that moment. Romans 8:26 says, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness..." The Holy Spirit is your helper, and in those moments of stress, you can pray, "Lord, I don't have the patience right now, but I know You do. Please let Your patience flow through me."

3. Respond with Grace, Not Just in Action, but in Heart

Patience isn't just about controlling your behavior on the outside; it's about reflecting Christ's grace on the inside. Ephesians 4:2 encourages us to "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." In those moments when your child is upset, try to focus on offering grace—not only in how you respond outwardly but in how you see the situation. 1 Peter 4:10 says, "Each of you should use

whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." Your response can be a reflection of God's grace to others, especially your child. It's a chance to model the patience Christ has shown you, knowing that He has shown "endless patience" with you.

4. Trust God with the Outcome

It's also important to remember that patience isn't about fixing the situation instantly. In those moments, it might not be about making the tantrum stop right away, but about being patient with both your child and yourself. Trust that God is at work in you, and even if you don't "feel" patient, you can rest in the fact that He is using the moment to shape you. Romans 5:3-4 says, "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." Trust that God is working amid those trying situations, even when it's hard to see at the moment.

5. Speak Truth to Yourself

Another way to allow Christ's patience to flow through you is to remind yourself of the truth. When you feel like you can't be patient, remind yourself of passages like Romans 15:5, which says, "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had." When you start to feel overwhelmed, speak out loud, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). And remember, Christ's patience is greater than anything I'm experiencing right now. He can empower me to reflect that same patience to others.

In moments like these, patience is not a performance; it's a fruit that grows as we remain in Christ and rely on the Holy Spirit. Even when you don't feel patient, you can trust that His patience is being cultivated in you. 2 Corinthians 12:9 reminds us, "But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." In those moments of weakness, when you feel like you don't have patience, remember that it's not about your strength—it's about Christ's power in you. And that power enables you to handle even the most difficult situations with grace, patience, and love.

Abundant Life and Spiritual Growth

How can we cultivate the abundant life Jesus offers us and the spiritual growth that Jesus desires for us? What practical steps can we take to position ourselves to grow in the Fruit of the Spirit and experience greater intimacy with God? Let's explore some of these practices that can help us cultivate the growth and abundance Jesus promises.

1. Commit to Daily Time in God's Word

The Bible is the primary way God speaks to us. Through His Word, we discover His character, His promises, and His guidance for living. By regularly reading Scripture, we allow the Holy Spirit to renew our minds and transform our hearts. When you come to God's Word with a heart to encounter Jesus and truly see Him in its pages, something extraordinary happens. Life is supernaturally imparted to you. God is in the business of infusing life into every area of your being. As Proverbs 4:22 says, His words "are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh."

This means that if you're feeling weary, reading God's Word will renew and energize you. If you're struggling with depression, it will lift you from the darkness and fill your heart with peace and joy. If you're battling illness, His Word will bring healing and restore divine health to your body.

Receiving God's life means experiencing revival and resurrection in areas of your life that feel barren or lifeless. God's life is exactly what you need when you see signs of death in your circumstances. Is your marriage in trouble? Have your dreams been shattered or forgotten? Have your finances dissolved into debt? If an area of your life feels dead or hopeless, don't give in to despair. Don't try to fix things by your effort or struggle. Instead, cast your cares upon the Lord, for He cares for you, and spend time in His Word to receive His life-giving supply. His Resurrection life will rekindle your marriage—turning ordinary moments into something extraordinary. It will revive your lost dreams or spark new ones in your heart. It will multiply your resources, so you will have more than enough for you and your loved ones.

Moreover, when you receive God's life through His Word, you also begin to experience the Fruit of the Spirit powerfully. As you abide in Christ and His Word abides in you, the Holy Spirit works in you to cultivate love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). These qualities begin to overflow in your life, shaping your character and transforming your relationships. You start to reflect the very nature of Christ, producing fruit that glorifies God and blesses those around you.

To experience this impartation of life and health in every area of your life, it's not enough to merely read

the Word casually. It's about seeing Jesus in the Word. When you behold Him, His life flows into you and transforms everything you touch.⁴

2. Cultivate a Consistent Prayer Life

Prayer is how we communicate with God, and it is vital for intimacy with Him. Jesus Himself modeled a life of prayer, and through prayer, we can align our hearts with God's will. A daily, intentional time of prayer—whether in praise, petition or simply listening—allows the Holy Spirit to shape our hearts, making us more sensitive to His leading and more attuned to His presence.

3. Live in the Power of the Holy Spirit

Spiritual growth cannot happen by our strength. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to bear the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. By surrendering daily to the Holy Spirit's guidance, asking Him to empower us to live out God's will, and inviting His presence into every area of our lives, we position ourselves to experience true spiritual growth. The more we rely on the Spirit, the more we will reflect His fruit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

4. Engage in Christian Fellowship

Spiritual growth thrives in the context of community. We are not meant to grow in isolation. By being part of a local church, participating in small groups, and surrounding ourselves with other believers, we are encouraged and supported in our walk with God. Fellowship provides opportunities for serving others,

⁴Joseph Prince. See Jesus in the Word Gives Life!
www.josephprince.org/blog/articles/seeing-jesus-in-the-word-gives-life

sharing wisdom, and praying for one another, all of which contribute to our growth and spiritual maturity.

5. Serve Others

Jesus Himself came to serve, and He calls us to do the same. Serving others—whether through acts of kindness, volunteering, or meeting practical needs—helps us grow in humility and compassion. Serving with a heart of love allows the Fruit of the Spirit to flow out of us and touch the lives of those around us. As we serve, we are reminded that our lives are not just about us but about bringing glory to God by blessing others.

6. Practice Gratitude

Gratitude shifts our focus from our circumstances to God's goodness. A heart of thankfulness helps us to see God at work in every aspect of our lives, even during difficult seasons. Gratitude cultivates joy, peace, and contentment—key components of the Fruit of the Spirit. By regularly counting our blessings and offering thanks to God, we grow in humility and deepen our trust in His faithfulness.

7. Stay Faithful in the Small Things

Spiritual growth happens over time, often in the quiet, unseen moments of life. Being faithful in the small things—whether it's maintaining a heart of patience in traffic, showing kindness to a stranger, or being consistent in prayer—are habits that can be developed over time. The more we practice living out God's character in our everyday actions (walking in the Spirit), the more the fruit of the Spirit is produced in and through us.

8. Expect and Welcome Trials

God uses trials to refine our faith and strengthen our character. James 1:2-4 reminds us to “consider it pure joy” when we face trials, knowing that they produce perseverance, which leads to spiritual maturity. Through life’s challenges, God shapes us more into His image, teaching us patience, dependence on Him, and how to trust Him in all circumstances.

By committing to these practices, we can create an environment where the Holy Spirit can work in us, transforming us more and more into the image of Christ. As we cultivate a life of prayer, worship, obedience, and service, we position ourselves to bear the Fruit of the Spirit, experiencing the abundant life and intimacy with God that Jesus desires for us. Through it all, we remember that growth is a process, and the grace of God is always with us, empowering us every step of the way.

Chapter 1

The Abundance of the Spirit Small Group Questions

1. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul says that if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. How does understanding that you have a new heart and identity in Christ change the way you approach life's challenges? In what areas of your life do you still struggle to live out your new identity, and how can you rely on Christ in you to overcome those struggles?

2. Galatians 2:20 highlights the profound truth that "Christ lives in me." Considering the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), how does this truth shape the way you view virtues like patience, kindness, or self-control? Which of these fruits do you find hardest to live out, and how can you invite Christ to bear that fruit in you?

3. Jesus teaches in John 15 that we can do nothing apart from Him. What does it mean to “abide” in Christ in a practical way? How does this concept of abiding connect to spiritual growth and experiencing abundance in life? What are some ways you can intentionally “remain in the vine” this week to cultivate more of the Fruit of the Spirit in your life?

4. In John 15:8, Jesus says that bearing fruit brings glory to the Father and shows we are His disciples. How does fellowshiping with other believers help us cultivate more fruit expressed in our lives?

5. The idea of cultivating abundance in Christ involves intentional steps to foster growth, much like a gardener nurturing a plant. Jesus teaches that God, the master gardener, “lifts us up” when we are not bearing fruit, and even prunes us to help us grow even more (John 15:2). How does it change your perspective to know that God actively cares for and “lifts you up” in your spiritual growth, even when you’re feeling unproductive or stuck? What does this reveal about His commitment to your growth and the abundance He wants to produce in your life?

Chapter 2
Love (agápē)- The Foundation of Abundant Life



Amid a world that's often divided and fractured, the words from 1 John 4:7 ring out as a profound and timeless call: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God."

At first glance, 1 John 4:7 might appear to be a simple exhortation—after all, love is a concept we encounter everywhere. It's a word sung in countless songs, featured in movies, and woven into everyday conversations. However, beneath the surface of this seemingly familiar command lies something far deeper than a mere cliché. This verse isn't just asking us to "love" in the way the world often understands it—an emotion or fleeting sentiment—it's calling us to a love that is rooted in God's very nature and empowered by His presence in our lives. It's about living love in a way that reflects our relationship with our Creator. This love is transformative, sacrificial, and ultimately divine. When John calls us to love one another, he's urging us to embrace a higher, more powerful expression of love—one that mirrors God's own love for us.

"But the Fruit of the Spirit is love (agápē): a love feast. Feasts expressing and fostering mutual love which used to be held by Christians before the celebration of the Lord's Supper.⁵ "Acts 2:46 tells us: "Continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart." The expression, "breaking bread," no doubt includes the celebration of the Eucharist. However, the phrase, "they ate their food with gladness" would also indicate that this was more than communion; it was also a

⁵www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g26/niv/mgnt/0-1/

meal.”⁶ These shared meals were not just for sustenance, but a joyful expression of God’s love and community among believers.

The word “agápē” describes the very character of God, as stated in 1 John 4:8b: “God is love.” When agápē is used in the Bible, it refers to a pure, willful, and sacrificial love that intentionally seeks the highest good of others. The term is used 106 times in the New Testament, with the majority of references found in the book of 1 John. This love, “agápē”, is not sentimental or emotional, but is rooted in God’s very nature. As 1 John 4:8 affirms, “God is love”—meaning He is the ultimate source of agápē. His love is unmerited, overflowing with grace, and poured out sacrificially. We are called to live by this love, to reflect it in our lives, because we have been recipients of it. Agápē is not a passive feeling but a conscious choice—an intentional striving for the good of others. God set the ultimate example of agápē love by sending Jesus to die for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). This sacrificial love is the standard for how we are to love one another.⁷

“Let us love one another”, the love John refers to isn’t just any kind of affection. It’s not “eros” love, the passionate love we might feel in a romantic relationship, or “phileo”, the brotherly love we share with close friends. It’s not even “storge” love, the natural affection we feel for our families. The kind of love John wants us to express toward one another is “agápē” love—unconditional, sacrificial love that

⁶History of the Early Church. www.earlychurch.com/love-feast/

⁷Alyssa Roat. What is Agape Love? Bible Meaning and Examples. Christianity.com. April 17, 2024. www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-does-agape-love-really-mean-in-the-bible.html

originates with God and is poured out into the hearts of His followers.

The Power of Agápē Love

Agápē love is the heart of the Gospel. It is the love that God Himself is, and the love He shows us. In 1 John 4:8, John says, "God is love". This is not merely a statement about God's actions or emotions. It is a declaration about the very essence of His being. God's love is not just something He does; it is who He is. And because of that, the love He gives is not based on feelings, attraction, or circumstances—it is a deliberate, sacrificial choice to seek the well-being of another. This love is not about emotional highs or warm feelings; it's about commitment, self-sacrifice, and the willingness to give of yourself for the good of others, even when it's difficult or costly.

The Supernatural Nature of Agápē Love

Jesus Himself demonstrated this kind of love in His life and death. He did not love us because we were lovable or because we deserved it. He loved us because He chose to, even when we were lost in sin. In Matthew 5:44, Jesus gives an impossible command, one that we can't fulfill without Christ living in us. "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." This is not a love that comes naturally to us; it's supernatural. It's a love that can only come from God, and it's a love He pours into our hearts through His Holy Spirit.

When John writes about the command to love one another, he's not just talking about loving those who are easy to love. It's not about showing affection only to our friends or family members who treat us well. It's about loving the difficult, the hard-to-love, the ones who oppose us and persecute us.

In 1 John 4:7, John writes, “Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.” This means that true love— agápē love—is the result of being born again. It’s not something we can manufacture. When we are connected to Jesus, love naturally flows from us. However, living in a fallen world means that, even though love is a natural outflow of being God’s children, we still need the reminder and the command to love. Why? Because we can’t live out God’s love unless we are continually “fed” by His love.

The Nourishment of God’s Word

God promises that those who are born of Him will love. But just because we are born of God doesn’t mean we will always express the love of God. We need to be continually fed by God’s Word—the spiritual nourishment that enables us to love the way He loves. Without this nourishment, our love will become weak, diluted, and ineffective. But when we are regularly fed by God’s Word, the love He has poured into our hearts grows and flourishes.

In 1 John 4:9, John gives us the ultimate proof of God’s love: “This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.” God’s love for us is not abstract or theoretical—it is tangible, sacrificial, and demonstrated in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ death on the cross was the ultimate act of love: He laid down His life for us, not because we deserved it, but because He chose to love us.

When we understand and embrace the depth of God’s love for us, it changes everything. It gives us an unshakable foundation for our identity. Our worth is no longer dependent on the opinions of others or

founded on our circumstances; it is rooted in God's love for us. And because we have received such incredible love, we are now empowered to love others in the same way—sacrificially, unconditionally, and without expecting anything in return.

Living by Loving

John doesn't just tell us about God's love; he calls us to live by that love. In 1 John 4:10, he writes, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." We love because God first loved us. This is the foundation of our ability to love others. It's not about mustering up love on our own; it's about receiving the love God has already given us and letting it flow through us to others.

In the final verses of this chapter, John sums up the essence of what it means to live as a follower of Christ: "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11).

God has shown us the deepest, most sacrificial love possible. And because we are His beloved, we are called to love others in this same way. This is the radical love that changes the world. It's the kind of love that reaches out to the hurting, the marginalized, the lost, and the broken. It's a love that asks for nothing in return but gives freely, knowing that only through God's love can we truly live as we were meant to—experiencing the fullness of His grace and the abundance of His love.

Don't Hide From God's Love- Receive it

There are two ways a person can try to hide from God's love: rebellion and religion. Rebellion, like the prodigal son, openly rejects God's love, choosing to

cover up guilt and shame through indulgence in selfish desires. Religion, though, is far more subtle. It attempts to mask the same guilt but through good works and obligations. Yet, like the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son, religion denies God's rightful place in our lives and keeps us from truly knowing Him.

At its core, religion is about keeping score—striving for God's acceptance through our efforts, whether through good deeds or religious rituals. This puts the focus on us and what we can do to earn God's favor, which ultimately leads to frustration and failure.

Much of Paul's letters were written because even the earliest Christians fell into the trap of exchanging a relationship with God for religious performance. Instead of living in the security of God's unconditional love, they turned back to traditions, rules, and rituals, hoping to earn God's approval. Paul repeatedly reminded them that God's love for them was not earned based on their good works.

God Loves You Completely

What would you do today if you knew, without a doubt, that God loves you completely? The answer to that question will draw you closer to His life and purpose for you than any effort of religious living ever could. The key to living a fruitful Christian life isn't waking up each day trying to earn God's love but waking up with the awareness that you are already His beloved. ⁸ To read more about the Father's immense

⁸Wayne Jacobsen. *He Loves Me: Learning to Live in the Father's Affection*. Wind Blown Media. 2008. Pages 137-138.

love for you pick up a copy of *Prodigal: Limitless Love of A Gracious Father*⁹ on Amazon.

As we reflect on the radical and transformative nature of God’s agápē love, we begin to see how this love forms the very foundation of our identity. Our world is filled with countless ways to define ourselves—through our achievements, our relationships, our possessions, or even the approval of others. But none of these definitions can truly capture who we are at our core. God’s unconditional love is the only identity-defining truth that remains unshakable amid life’s uncertainties. When you truly begin to experience and rest in God’s love, it transforms the way you love others. It reshapes the way you view yourself. You no longer define yourself by your achievements or what you do, but by the simple truth that you are a cherished child of God. This deep security in His love then flows out in how you love those around you.

When we grasp the reality that we are loved by God—not based on our performance, not on our mistakes, and not on anything we could ever do to earn it, but simply because He has chosen to love us—everything changes. Life is a gift of unparalleled beauty, woven with purpose and grace, because we are deeply loved by our Creator. “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are” (1 John 3:1)!

Our identity moves from being based on what we do to being rooted in who we are in Him. In a world where so many of us struggle with insecurity, comparison, and the relentless pressure to

⁹Dr. Matthew Webster. *Prodigal: Limitless Love of a Gracious Father*. Kindle Direct Publishing. 2024.

prove our worth, God's love offers us a new and secure foundation. His love isn't just a feeling or an abstract concept; it's a powerful force that shapes how we see ourselves and how we interact with the world around us. When we are fully rooted in the truth that we are God's beloved, we no longer need to search for validation or meaning in external sources. We are free to live out of this identity, knowing that we are already enough because He loves us deeply and completely.

Exploring God's Unconditional Love: A Foundation for Our Identity

Consider this: what if our identity was no longer tied to the opinions of others or the fluctuating standards of success, but to the unchanging, eternal love of God? This would radically shift the way we live, love, and view ourselves. Instead of finding our worth in how we measure up to worldly standards, we would find our worth in the truth that God sees us as His beloved children, accepted and adored, just as we are.

This is what it means to be "born of God," as John writes in 1 John 4:7-8. Our identity as children of God is rooted in His love for us. It's not a love we have to earn, nor is it a love that's withdrawn when we fall short. This love is unchanging, unwavering, and ever-present. And when we begin to explore the depths of this love, we find that it becomes the truest and most secure foundation for our identity.

Understanding God's unconditional love has a profound impact on how we see ourselves. The lies of the enemy that tell us we're unworthy or not enough lose their power when we realize that God loves us with a love that is not based on anything we can do, but purely on His grace.

When we allow ourselves to be defined by God's love, we experience a freedom that no external circumstance can take away. We no longer have to be defined by our past mistakes, our successes, or our failures. Our identity is secure in God's love, and this becomes the lens through which we view everything in our lives. When we understand that our true identity is anchored in God's love, it transforms the way we live. Instead of striving to be loved or accepted, we begin to live from a place of security and confidence, knowing that we are already fully loved and accepted by God. This doesn't mean that we'll never struggle with insecurity or doubt, but it means that our foundational identity is no longer tied to the shifting sands of external validation. It is rooted in the love of the One who knows us completely and loves us anyway. To be known is to be loved. Psalm 139:1-4 illustrates this beautifully:

"You have searched me, Lord, and You know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, You, Lord, know it completely."

This knowing is not just intellectual; it's personal and intimate. And in God's perfect love, this knowledge doesn't drive Him away. He loves us not in spite of knowing us, but because He knows us completely.

In human relationships, this idea resonates as well. True intimacy in a relationship is not possible without being vulnerable and letting the other person fully know who you are. The more we are known by another person, and still accepted, the more deeply loved we feel. This mutual knowing and loving builds

trust and security, creating a foundation for love to thrive.

In essence, to be truly loved, we must allow ourselves to be fully known—both by others and by God—because it is in this openness and transparency that love deepens and flourishes.

The Challenge and the Invitation

The challenge for us today is to live in this place of being loved. To stop striving for approval, to stop living for the next achievement or external affirmation, and to simply rest in the truth that we are God's beloved. This doesn't mean we stop growing and becoming the best versions of ourselves in Christ, it means we do all of this from a place of deep security in God's love, knowing that we are already enough.

"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear (underlined emphasis is mine). With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. And He said, "The Kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how" (Mark 4:23–27).

As you keep receiving God's Word, it is producing fruit in your life day by day. "He himself does not know how" (Mark 4:27).

As this person is in contact with the Word through hearing, meditating on it, reading it, it is sinking into his heart and germinating. God is saying that this man does not need to know or worry about how the seed grows.

The Gospel of Grace that we need to keep hearing proclaims the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, emphasizing God's love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness. When we hear and receive this message with faith, we experience spiritual growth, transformation, and an abundance of God's blessings.

This truth is what anchors our identity and empowers us to live as the people God created us to be. When we explore God's unconditional love, we discover that it's not just a theological concept to understand—it's a reality to live in. And as we live in that reality, we are transformed.

So, what would happen if we lived every day with the unshakable knowledge that we are God's beloved? How would our choices, our relationships, and our purpose be shaped by that truth? This is the invitation of the Gospel: to live in the freedom and security of God's unconditional love and to let that love be the foundation of our identity.

As you explore the depth of God's love for you, ask yourself, "How can I begin to live more fully from the truth that I am already loved and accepted by God?" Because when we live out of this truth, everything else falls into place. Our identity becomes clear, our purpose becomes focused, and our ability to love others becomes limitless—just as God's love for us is.

As we explore the profound truth that God's love is the foundation of our identity, the next essential step is understanding the importance of accepting that love. It's one thing to know about God's love, but it's something altogether different to fully embrace and receive it.

In 1 John 4:9, John writes, “This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.” God didn’t just say He loved us; He demonstrated it in the most profound way possible: by sending His Son to live among us, suffer on our behalf, and die in our place. God’s love is a gift, but it is a gift that must be received.

The Challenge of Accepting God’s Love

For many of us, accepting God’s love is easier said than done. We often wrestle with feelings of unworthiness, shame, or doubt—thinking that God’s love is for everyone else, but not for us. We may feel that our past mistakes or current struggles disqualify us from receiving such unconditional love. But the Gospel tells us that God’s love is a gift that is freely given.

This is where the true power of God’s love is unlocked in our lives. When we accept God’s love, we acknowledge that we do not need to be perfect to receive it. We do not need to have it all together. God’s love meets us in our brokenness, in our mess, and in our imperfections. The moment we open our hearts to receive God’s love is the moment we are transformed—not by anything we can do, but by what He has already done for us. This is the beauty of grace.

Why Acceptance is So Crucial

John 1:12, says, “Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.” The key word here is “receive”. Jesus offers His love to us freely, but we must receive it. This is not passive; it is an active

choice to believe that God's love is real, to trust that it is for us, and to allow it to shape who we are.

When we accept God's love, it radically transforms our relationship with Him and with others. Acceptance of God's love is not just an emotional experience; it is a spiritual transformation. When we accept God's love, we begin to see ourselves the way He sees us. We are not defined by our failures, mistakes, or shortcomings; we are defined by His love. No longer are we motivated by fear or insecurity, but by love. Moreover, accepting God's love empowers us to live out of His strength rather than our own. We live in the freedom that comes from knowing that God's love is unchanging, and it is sufficient.

When we truly accept God's love, we begin to live free from the chains of guilt, shame, and insecurity. We stop measuring our worth by the world's standards, and we start to live in the freedom of being God's beloved children. One of the most powerful verses in Scripture is found in Romans 8:1, where Paul writes: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

This verse is a game-changer as it reveals grace in its essence: God will not count my sins against me. I deserve punishment. I deserve separation from God forever. I should be condemned. But in an act of unimaginable love, God gave me what I didn't deserve when He sent Jesus to die in my place. Jesus bore the penalty of my sin so that, in Him, I might be given His life and counted as righteous. Romans 8:1 declares that for those who are in Christ—those who have accepted God's love and forgiveness—there is no condemnation. Let that sink in for a moment. No condemnation. No guilt. No shame. All of this means

that no accusation from the enemy can stand against us when we are in Christ.

This verse is simple to understand, yet profoundly difficult to grasp in the messy moments of life. It's easy to accept when we're living our best lives, but much harder when we've messed up. When we stumble, we often think, "God must be angry with me now." "God must have caused that flat tire, or that shopping cart to dent my car, to teach me a lesson for my road rage." But that would be a petty God—one who holds our mistakes over our heads, waiting to punish us at every turn. Yet, I hear this all the time: "God is judging me" but the truth is, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ". Your worst moments have been forgiven. And that's hard to believe, isn't it? But here's the good news: In Christ, you are free! In Christ, you are forgiven!

Guilt and shame often arise from the belief that we are not worthy of God's love. We carry the weight of our past mistakes, our sins, and the things we wish we could undo. And because of that, we can feel unworthy or even afraid to approach God. We may think that because we have failed, we are no longer loved or accepted. But Romans 8:1 speaks directly to this lie. In Christ, we are no longer condemned. Our guilt is washed away, and our shame is removed. Jesus took all of it upon Himself on the cross, and because of His sacrifice, we are free. The enemy may try to accuse us, to remind us of our failures, but God's Word declares that we are not condemned and in Jesus, we never will be.

What is condemnation? It is a permanent sense of guilt that tells us we are hopeless, beyond repair, and unworthy of love or grace. It is the voice that says,

“You’ve failed too many times,” or “You’re not good enough to be accepted by God.”

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. When we accept Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf, we are declared “not guilty” before God. His love does not come with conditions or limits. Colossians 2:13-14 says: “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.”

The Healing Power of God’s Love

Once we truly grasp that there is no condemnation in Christ, guilt and shame begin to lose their power over us. God’s love is greater than our failures. His grace covers our sins, and His mercy restores us.

This understanding brings healing. Guilt and shame no longer define our identity—God’s love does. We are not our failures; we are His beloved. When we accept this truth, we experience the freedom that comes from being fully known and fully loved. This freedom allows us to step into the fullness of God’s plans for our lives without being weighed down by the past. And here’s what happens when you receive this truth: Because of how greatly you have been forgiven, you are now empowered to extend forgiveness to others—people who, like you, don’t deserve it.

We’ve all been taught to wait for someone to apologize or show remorse before offering forgiveness. But the truth is, if you carry an offense against someone, the only person you’re hurting is yourself. And forgiveness isn’t about letting someone

off the hook; it's about freeing yourself from the weight of bitterness and resentment.

Grace and Its Misunderstandings

Now, some Christians 2,000 years ago had a hard time understanding grace. They would ask, "If God's grace covers all our sins, shouldn't we just keep on sinning so grace can abound" (Romans 6:1)? Paul's response was a sharp, "Certainly not!" He goes on to say, "How can we who have died to sin live in it any longer" (Romans 6:2)?

God's grace sets us free from the prison of sin and death at the cost of Jesus' life. But continuing to sin—choosing to walk in the flesh rather than the Spirit—brings damaging consequences.

It's a bit like the game of Monopoly. If you've ever played, you're familiar with the "Get Out of Jail Free" card. Once you have it, you can be released from jail, at any point during the game. But having that card doesn't stop you from making poor decisions along the way. I remember one time my opponent was so broke that they chose to stay in jail rather than use their "Get Out of Jail Free" card—fearing they might land on one of my properties.

Similarly, Jesus came to give us abundant life—a life overflowing with peace, joy, and purpose. But even though we've been given freedom through Christ, many still choose to live in the prison of condemnation, fear, or despair. They hesitate to embrace the freedom already granted to them, fearing to move forward in the game of life.

Our Advocate

“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (1 John 2:1).

In other words, God desires for us to walk in freedom, but He knows we’re not perfect. He knows that we will fall, and when we do, we have an “Advocate”—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. The word for “Advocate” (paraklētōs) means “one who pleads another’s cause before a judge.”¹⁰ Jesus is our legal counsel, pleading our case before God the Father.

Albert Barnes explained that Jesus, as our Advocate, admits our guilt. He doesn’t hide it. He doesn’t deny it or make excuses. Instead, He points to His own suffering and sacrifice, saying, “Yes, they are guilty. But I paid for their sins with My blood.” And when Satan—the accuser—tries to bring charges against us, Jesus steps in and says, “Father, the debt has already been paid.” And God slams the gavel, declaring, “Case dismissed!”¹¹

What a powerful truth! The moment you sin, Jesus defends you. You don’t need to atone for your sins—Jesus has already done that. His work on the cross is complete. Rest in the fact that Jesus is actively advocating for you. He is your lawyer, your defender, and He wants you to walk in the fullness of the life He died to give you.

¹⁰www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3875/kjv/tr/0-1/

¹¹Albert Barnes. Barnes’ Notes on the Whole Bible.
www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/bnb/1-john-2.html

The Power of Receiving God's Love

Before we can authentically love others, we need to understand what it means to receive God's love. It's not a one-time event; it's an ongoing process of opening our hearts to His love and letting it transform us from the inside out. And this kind of love isn't based on our performance or worthiness; it's based solely on the grace and goodness of God.

The Apostle Paul prays for the Ephesian church, saying: "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17-19).

Paul's prayer is not just for an intellectual understanding of God's love but for a deep, experiential grasp of it. He wants the Ephesians (and us) to experience the vastness of God's love—how wide, long, high, and deep it is. The love of God is so all-encompassing that we can never fully comprehend it with our minds, but when we receive it in our hearts, it begins to change everything about us.

God's love for us is constant, unfailing, and unconditional. When we open ourselves to God's love, it produces tangible fruit in our lives.

The Challenge of Loving Others Like God Loves Us

Loving others authentically isn't easy. It requires humility, patience, and sometimes a lot of grace. But the more we receive God's love, the more we are able to love others in a way that reflects His heart.

This love isn't always reciprocated. People won't always appreciate it. But remember, God's love for us wasn't based on our response. He loved us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). In the same way, we are called to love others, not based on their worthiness, or their receptivity to it, but because we have been loved by God.

Loving like God loves means loving when it's hard, loving when people don't deserve it, and loving even when we don't feel like it. It means putting others first, just as Jesus did. It means choosing to serve rather than be served, to forgive rather than harbor bitterness, and to speak words of life rather than condemnation.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). This is not a love that comes naturally; it is a love that flows from the heart of God empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Living Out Authentic Love in the World

When we begin to live out this authentic love, we become living testimonies of God's grace. The world will notice the way we love differently—the way we forgive, serve, and care for others, especially when it's difficult. Our love will be a powerful witness to the transformative power of the Gospel.

John 13:35 says, "By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another."

This is how the world will see that we belong to Christ—by the way we love. And when we love authentically, we show the world a picture of the love that God has for each one of them.

1. Practice Active Listening

One of the simplest yet most profound ways to love others is by listening to them. Taking time to truly listen—without interrupting or thinking of a response—shows that you value and care for the other person. It's a way of honoring them and letting them know they are seen and heard. Jesus was a master listener, often pausing to hear people's stories and respond with compassion. In our daily interactions, we can choose to slow down, give our full attention, and listen with empathy. Love is not just about what we do; it's about being present in someone's life. Sometimes, the best way to love someone is to simply be there for them—whether they need a shoulder to cry on, a listening ear, or someone to share a moment of joy with. Just as Jesus was present with those He loved, we can reflect His love by being available for others and giving them our time and attention.

Action step: Practice active listening today. Put away distractions (like your phone), make eye contact, and ask thoughtful questions to show that you care about the other person's heart.

2. Show Kindness Through Small Acts

God's love toward us is often shown through small acts of grace and kindness. In the same way, we can reflect God's love by performing small acts of kindness throughout our day. These can be as simple as a kind word, a thoughtful gesture, or a helping hand. Jesus demonstrated kindness through simple actions, whether it was healing the sick, comforting the grieving, or serving others with love and humility.

Action step: Look for opportunities throughout the day to perform a small act of kindness. Maybe it's holding the door open for someone, sending a text of

encouragement, or offering to help a coworker with a task.

3. Forgive Quickly and Freely

One of the most powerful ways we can express love is by forgiving others, just as God has forgiven us. We all face moments where we're hurt or offended, but when we hold on to unforgiveness, it hurts us more than the person who wronged us. God's love frees us from bitterness and resentment, enabling us to forgive even when it's difficult. Forgiveness doesn't mean we excuse someone's wrong actions, but it means we release the need for revenge or punishment, entrusting them to God's justice and mercy. Authentic love is not blind. It doesn't ignore faults or pretend that everything is okay when it's not. God's love is a love of truth. It doesn't tolerate sin but offers grace to help us overcome it. When we are filled with God's love, we learn to extend truth and grace in our relationships. We speak the truth in love, but we also extend grace to those who are struggling.

Action step: Choose to forgive quickly. If you're holding onto a hurt, pray and release that person to God. Ask God to help you see them through His eyes and give you a heart of mercy and compassion.

4. Speak Words of Life and Encouragement

Our words have the power to build up or tear down. God's words toward us are filled with encouragement, affirmation, and life. As recipients of His love, we are called to speak words that reflect that same life-giving nature. Encourage others, speak words of hope, and offer compliments that lift them up. A simple word of encouragement can be a powerful expression of God's love.

Action step: Intentionally speak words of encouragement to someone today. Compliment them on something specific, affirm their worth, or share an uplifting Scripture.

5. Serve Others Selflessly

Love is most beautifully demonstrated through selfless acts of service. Jesus washed the feet of His disciples to show us that true greatness comes through serving others. When we serve, we reflect the heart of God, who came to serve us, not to be served.

Action step: Look for ways to serve others this week. It could be helping a neighbor with their groceries, volunteering at a local charity, or simply offering your time to someone who needs it.

6. Pray for Others

Prayer is one of the most powerful ways to express love. When we pray for someone, we are lifting them up before God, asking Him to work in their lives. Praying for others shows that we care about their well-being and that we believe in the power of God to move in their circumstances. Jesus often prayed for others, demonstrating that intercession is a vital part of love.

Action step: Take a few minutes each day to pray for the people in your life. Ask God to bless them, to heal them, or to guide them in their struggles. Let them know you're praying for them.

7. Show Patience in Difficult Relationships

Love is patient, and sometimes the most loving thing we can do is to exercise patience in difficult or strained relationships. We are all works in progress, and sometimes the people we love are in the process

of growing, healing, or changing. Just as God is patient with us, we are called to extend the same patience to others. This doesn't mean tolerating harmful behavior, but it does mean allowing space for people to grow, make mistakes, and find their way.

Action step: In a difficult relationship, choose to be patient. Instead of reacting in frustration or anger, pause, pray, and ask God to help you respond with grace.

8. Live with an Eternal Perspective

Loving others authentically means recognizing the eternal value of relationships. We are not just here to get through life or fulfill personal ambitions; we are here to reflect God's love and share it with others. When we live with an eternal perspective, we begin to view people not just as temporary interactions, but as precious souls whom God loves deeply. Our love for others becomes more intentional, purposeful, and sacrificial. Did you know that people are the treasures that we can take with us to Heaven? "But store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven" (Matthew 6:20a).

Action step: Consider how your actions today might have an opportunity to help others receive God's love. Look for opportunities to share God's love with others, whether through kindness, words of truth, or serving with a heart of compassion.

When you're rooted in His love, expressing it comes naturally—whether through a kind word, a helping hand, or a prayer for someone in need. God has called us to love others as He has loved us, and when we live this out, we become conduits of His grace and transformation in the world.

So, let's go out and love—authentically, selflessly, and powerfully—just as we've been loved by God.

Chapter 2

Love (agápē)- The Foundation of Abundant Life Small Group Questions

1) How does understanding that God's love is unconditional and sacrificial (agápē) change the way you view both yourself and others, especially in moments of conflict or difficulty? How can we move beyond a performance-based love (either in ourselves or others) and embrace the love God has already given us?

2) In a world that constantly asks us to prove our worth through achievements, possessions, or the approval of others, what would it look like to truly live out of the identity that God loves us unconditionally and calls us His beloved? How does this shift in identity affect the way we love others, particularly those who are difficult to love?

3) How does the truth that “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1) challenge the way you view your past mistakes, guilt, and shame? In what ways can accepting God’s love and forgiveness help you break free from these barriers and live more fully in the security of your identity as His beloved child?

4) How does understanding that God's love for us is unconditional and sacrificial change the way we approach loving others—especially when they don't deserve it or when it's difficult for us to love them? Can you think of a specific relationship or situation where this truth is challenging to apply, and what would it look like to love like God in that context?

Chapter 3
Joy (chará) - The Strength in Celebration



One of the most incredible statements for Christian living is found in two places in Scripture, for us to “rejoice always”. 1 Thessalonians 5:16 says, it, and Philippians 4:4 says it again only slightly differently, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” When we examine the word rejoice and what our rejoicing is tied to through the various usages of the word in the New Testament, we will discover how this instruction of living and walking in the Spirit by rejoicing would not have been available to the people of the Old Testament. None of the Fruit of the Spirit was available to Old Testament saints because they did not have the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit as we have in the New Covenant.

How Would You Define Joy?

When you think about joy, how would you define it? What exactly is joy, and how is it different from happiness?

Joy is a central theme in the book of Philippians, appearing in 15 explicit references to the Greek words “chará” (joy) and “chairó” (to rejoice). It’s a theme that runs deep throughout the letter, and it’s no coincidence that Paul emphasizes it so much. In the Hebrew tradition, the number 15 holds symbolic significance, often representing a new direction and divine inspiration. The number is associated with the Hebrew letters “Yud” (10) and “Hay” (5), which signify inspiration that leads to a new meaning in life and opens the way for change. Joy, then, is something given to every believer through Jesus Christ—a gift that points to a new life, a new direction, and a new perspective. Joy is a byproduct of grace and salvation, elements of our redemption that bring healing, fullness, and renewal.

Perhaps it's also not coincidental that Paul's letter to the Philippians contains 15 references to joy. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul also lists 15 spiritual blessings of being in Christ, highlighting the fullness and richness of life we find in Him.

While the world encourages us to pursue happiness, joy, and happiness are not the same thing. Happiness is often tied to circumstances. Happiness is dependent on what happens to us—when things are going well, we feel happy, but when something negative occurs, that happiness can quickly fade. For instance, one moment you might be scrolling through social media, enjoying a happy post, and the next, you read sad news—like the death of someone you knew—and just like that, your happiness evaporates.

The key difference is that joy isn't dependent on our circumstances. Unlike happiness, which fluctuates with what's happening around us, joy is a choice rooted in the truth that God is in control. It flows from our relationship with Him, remaining steady no matter what we face. While happiness comes and goes, joy is constant because it is anchored in Christ. Joy declares, "God is in control", and overflows as we focus on Jesus, trust His sovereignty, and delight in His presence.

In Philippians 1:3-6, Paul writes: "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Here, Paul expresses profound joy not during his success or comfort, but while he's in prison. He's writing from a place of suffering, perhaps in a Roman or Ephesian prison, around 62 BC. The timing and place of this letter are significant. If Paul were writing this letter after the best few weeks of his life—perhaps after planting a new church, seeing countless people saved, or receiving accolades—his words of joy might not have the same weight. If everything were going well, we might think that joy is tied directly to external circumstances. However, Paul writes this letter of joy from prison, during a time when his circumstances were far from ideal. His message is clear: joy is not dependent on what is happening to you or around you. Joy is not the same as happiness.

In John 16:16-24, Jesus speaks about a joy that transcends circumstances: "Your sorrow will turn into joy. And you will have joy that no one can take from you." This joy, rooted in Christ's promises, isn't fleeting or dependent on how things are going. It's a joy that can't be taken away by the challenges or hardships we face. For the one who rests in the promises of Christ and prays according to God's will, joy becomes a constant—a joy that endures through both sorrow and triumph.

Joy is a choice. We choose whether we will rejoice in the Lord, whether we will hold on to joy in trials or surrender it by doubting God's promises. We can allow our circumstances to steal our joy, or we can choose to rest in the unshakable truth that God is with us and for us. When we try to find our satisfaction outside of our relationship with Christ, joy can be elusive. But

when we fix our eyes on Him, trust Him, and rest in Him in every season, joy overflows.

This is one of the most remarkable things about joy: no one and nothing can rob you of your joy, because it is not anchored in circumstances, but in your relationship with Jesus. That's why Paul, even in prison, is filled with joy. He understood that joy flows from a deeper place—a place that is untouched by the changing tides of life.

Joy is not a feeling that rises and falls with the waves of our circumstances. It is a settled confidence in God's goodness, a peace that comes from knowing we are His. When we choose joy, we choose to trust in the one who holds our future, knowing that His love and His promises are enough.

The Biblical Definition of Rejoice

"Rejoice" (chairō): to be cheerful, be well:—farewell, be glad, joy(- fully), rejoice.¹²

One particular aspect of this definition stood out to me, "be well". Our wellness is connected to our rejoicing which is because of Jesus. Another passage in Scripture tells us the remedy for when we are not well and it involves rejoicing too.

James 5:13-14: "Is anyone among you (afflicted) in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord."

¹²<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5463/niv/mgnt/0-1/>

According to James, we have three different human experiences listed, affliction (trouble), happiness, and sickness. A list of two bad things and one great thing. Nobody suffers from the ailment of being too happy.

What James is doing is he is giving the prescription for the problems that would plague us and make us unwell (which include afflictions and sicknesses). Sandwiched between the two ailments is the prescription, "Let them sing songs of praise". James also includes prayer and anointing oil.

Being merry comes as we are fully persuaded regarding God's promises- and if you believe that what God's Word says is true- you are going to sing in celebration of what that means for your life. Faith is saying "Amen" to the Lord who heals.

Our joy and our rejoicing are connected to Jesus. According to Commentary Critical and Explanatory of the Whole Bible "Oil in the East, and especially among the Jews was a sign of the divine grace" (James 5:14).¹³ The oil reminds me as I pray who my Healer is, who we are taking this situation too, that's the job of the Holy Spirit in me when I pray. This is a form of worshipping in Spirit and in Truth. It is all about the grace of Jesus Christ who bore our infirmities and by His stripes we are healed. Rejoice always in Him, even in your infirmities, and the result through your rejoicing will be wholeness and health to your body that is what James is telling us to do.

¹³www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/jfu/james-5.html

Biblical Examples of "Rejoice" and the Link to Jesus:

- "When they saw the star, they were overjoyed" (Matthew 2:10).

The star led them to the Messiah.

- "Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in Heaven" (Matthew 5:12).

Our reward in Heaven is made possible solely because of Jesus, whose sacrifice secured our eternal life with God.

- "He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth" (Luke 1:14).

This is speaking of the birth of John the Baptist.

The question is, what about him would cause joy?

As the forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist's mission was to demonstrate Jesus as the source of eternal life this was the joy that John brought.

- "But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:32).

This is from the story of the prodigal son which gives us a picture of God's love for us which can be seen through the sacrifice that Jesus made.

- Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56).

Abraham's faith looked forward to the Promised One -Jesus Christ.

- "But I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy" (John 16:22).

Seeing Jesus produces joy.

- “When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39).

The eunuch just received the salvation of the Lord and the result was “rejoicing” as he went.

- “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth” (1 Corinthians 13:6).

Jesus is the Truth (John 14:6).

- “But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:13).

Once again rejoicing is tied directly to Jesus, in this case, His glory is revealed.

- “It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us” (2 John 1:4).

John has joy in those who are walking in Jesus.

Another way of saying this is that they are being doers of the Word (James 1:22), their lives are in tune with God’s Word, and they are receiving and continuing in God’s Word.

- “Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7).

We have union life with Jesus and this causes us to rejoice. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or

wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:25-27).

All of these verses tell us that our rejoicing is rooted in Jesus. We can rejoice at all times and worship God in Spirit and Truth because we have "gained a surpassing victory through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37b). When we rejoice in the truth, in the suffering we endure for Christ, or in the salvation and life He gives, it is because of what He is doing in us. The fruit of joy is the work of God's Spirit within us, producing a deep and lasting joy rooted in our relationship with Jesus.

We gain deeper insight into the command to "rejoice always" when we consider the context of 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 and Philipians 4 more closely.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in every circumstance, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

This passage provides one of the clearest and most simple instructions for prayer. When should I pray? Always! How should I pray? By rejoicing always and giving thanks in all circumstances. The command to "pray without ceasing" doesn't mean we have to repeat the same requests over and over or that the quantity of our prayers determines whether or not God will answer. The foundation of our prayers is thanksgiving and rejoicing. It starts with knowing that, because of Jesus, your heavenly Father loves you and delights in giving good gifts to His children.

When you understand this and believe it, you will want to pray all the time (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Philippians 4:4: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

We can choose not to rejoice by doubting God's promises, refusing to pray according to His will, or seeking satisfaction in things other than Jesus. But no one and nothing can take your joy from you. This is why, even in prison, Paul could still rejoice with such joy. Your greatest responsibility is to rejoice in the Lord always and not to worry about your past mistakes, present challenges, or future uncertainties. Why? Because of what God's grace has already done for you. Instead of worrying, which can bring anxiety and distress, you can choose to pray. Paul acknowledges that worry will come, but instead of dwelling on it, he encourages us to pray, which will counter our worries and replace them with the peace of God (Philippians 4:6-7).

Joy in Communion

Receiving communion is vital because it's a celebration of the forgiveness of sins and the life and health we have through Jesus. It's amazing how Christ displaces worry when He takes center stage in our lives.

Philippians 4:6-7 teaches us that in everything, through prayer and thanksgiving, we can bring our requests before God. "With thanksgiving" means we first acknowledge God's blessings before presenting

our requests. Eucharistia, or “thanksgiving”,¹⁴ is where we get the word “communion” from.¹⁵ And it is during communion (which is done in thanksgiving) that we bring to our minds the superabounding victory we have in Christ and we invite joy to reign in our mind and hearts.

By praying with thanksgiving first, we are no longer focused on whether or not our petitions are answered in the exact way we want, at the exact time we want. The more we thank God, the more His peace fills our hearts. We become anxious for nothing. Whatever concerns you, bring them to your Father in prayer and thank Him for His faithfulness. God has promised to work all things together for our good, including the challenges we face. Therefore, our joy isn’t based on our circumstances, but on the truth that Christ lives in us and has given us His righteousness. This means we have the favor of our heavenly Father, the One to whom we bring our requests.

Because prayer is directly tied to rejoicing, it becomes clear that prayer is a form of New Testament worship. It is a vital and beautiful part of our relationship with God, where we speak to Him and encounter His presence.

The “Fast Pass” of Prayer

One of the newer features at theme parks is the “Fast Pass,” which allows visitors to skip the long lines for popular rides. Before the invention of the Fast Pass, if you wanted to go on a popular ride, you might have to

¹⁴www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2169/kjv/tr/0-1/

¹⁵en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eucharist

wait for hours. But with the Fast Pass, you bypass the wait and go straight to the front.

In some ways, the Old Testament system of sacrifice was like the theme parks before the Fast Pass. The Old Testament believer constantly had to offer sacrifices to the High Priest for sin, and their relationship with God was not restored permanently. They couldn't draw near to God directly because of sin. Jesus hadn't yet gone to the cross to open that door. The veil that separated God's presence from even the priests was torn at Jesus' death (Mark 15:38, Matthew 27:51, Luke 23:45). Today, we have the "Fast Pass" to God's presence, as found in Hebrews 4:16: "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

There's no longer any waiting for a sacrifice or ritual to be made. We can approach God boldly, any time we choose, the separation sin brought has been removed by the blood of the Lamb that was shed for our sin.

The New Access We Have in Christ

The phrase "Let us therefore" signals that something has dramatically changed. In the Old Testament, people had no confidence when presenting their petitions to God. They lived under the Law, which made them aware of their sin and their inability to come before God freely. Some believers still try to live under the Law today. When you don't understand that Jesus fulfilled the Law on your behalf, you'll end up trying to work for what God has already freely given you.

In the Old Testament, only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and he could only do so once a year on the Day of Atonement. If he didn't perform the rituals correctly, he would die. The people depended on the High Priest's sacrifice done perfectly because if he sinned, it affected the entire nation. But if the High Priest was without fault, God would accept the whole nation, even if the people were sinful.

So, what has changed? "Therefore, since we have a great High Priest who has ascended into Heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess" (Hebrews 4:14).

Praise God, we now have Jesus as our High Priest. His standing before God is always right and acceptable, so we can never lose our acceptance of God. As our High Priest, Jesus continually brings righteousness to His people. We can rejoice always in this truth.

In the Old Testament, when someone brought a sacrifice, the priest would examine the sacrifice, not the person who brought it. Today, God doesn't look at our imperfections. He looks at the sacrifice of Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, which makes us holy, righteous, and pure. God sees Jesus, and because of Jesus, He sees us as perfect, righteous, and acceptable. This is grace, and it's the reason we can boldly come before God's throne.

Grace is what we have been given (Hebrews 4:14-15) and God's Word tells us where and how we receive it (Hebrews 4:16)- at the throne of grace through our High Priest Jesus. The Gospel declares that grace to

help you in your time of need is available through Jesus and it is yours for the taking (Hebrews 4:16).¹⁶

John Piper said, “The sacrifices that the High Priest offers (Hebrews 5:3) point to Jesus because Jesus is such a perfect and complete fulfillment of the priesthood that He is not only the High Priest, but He is also the sacrifice that the High Priest gives (Hebrews 9:12, 25–26; 13:12).”¹⁷

Finding Joy During Trials

Let’s revisit Philippians 1.

“I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:3-6).

It’s remarkable to think about how Paul, even while imprisoned, found joy in the lives of others. When things weren’t going well for him, he didn’t focus on his suffering. He didn’t get jealous that he was alone in prison while other believers remained free. Instead, he chose to focus on the work God was doing through the people in his life. This shift in perspective led Paul to thank God every time he remembered them.

¹⁶Dr. Matthew Webster. *The Evolution of Worship: From the Garden to the Gates of Heaven*. Kindle Direct Publishing. 2022.

¹⁷John Piper. *Draw Near to the Throne of Grace with Confidence*.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/draw-near-to-the-throne-of-grace-with-confidence> September 15, 1996.

Take a moment to reflect on how news can shift your own emotions. Not long ago, I found out that my high school gym teacher had passed away. It was a sudden, sad moment. In times like these, it's easy to be consumed by grief. Even in times of sorrow, there is always an opportunity to look beyond our own circumstances and find joy in what God is doing in the lives of others. In moments of pain or loss, we can seek out reasons to be thankful—finding something that stirs joy, even when life feels overwhelming. And even if it's hard to rejoice in what's happening for others, we can always give thanks for Jesus and rejoice in all He has done for us.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul offers a powerful example of how thanksgiving in prayer leads to joy. In Philippians 1:3-4, Paul writes, "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy..." Here, he expresses gratitude for the partnership he has with other believers in the Gospel. For Paul, this partnership brought joy—not because everything was perfect in his life, but because of the bigger picture of God's work in and through others.

Now, I want to circle back to the question I asked earlier: What is joy? The Greek word for joy is "chará" which not only means joy but also cheerfulness, calm delight, and gladness.¹⁸ I believe one of the most significant aspects of this definition is "calm delight". Joy isn't merely a reaction to happy circumstances. It's a quiet, steady peace that persists even when life is difficult.

¹⁸www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5479/kjv/tr/0-1/

Think about it: isn't what bad news tends to do is it tries to rob us of our peace and joy, pulling us away from that calm delight? Paul was in prison, a situation that could have easily stripped him of joy. But rather than focusing on his struggles, Paul chose to focus on the good that was happening in the lives of his friends and fellow believers. Even during his pain, he chose to rejoice in God's work in them—and in the way that his situation might be used to advance the Gospel.

I've experienced this firsthand in my own life. There are moments when the questions pile up—"When will I feel better?" "When will things go back to normal?" "What does normal even feel like?" But in those moments, I try to remind myself that God is still at work. Just as Paul's prison time had a purpose, I believe that even in my struggles, God is shaping something out of it that will bless me and will bless others. Sometimes, it's through the most difficult seasons of our lives that God's light shines the brightest. What if, just like Paul, I'm being led through a dark valley so that others can see the light of Christ through me?

In Philippians 1:12-14, Paul writes, "Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the Gospel. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the Gospel without fear." Paul saw his imprisonment as an opportunity for God to use him in a way that would build others up in the faith. When we choose to look beyond our circumstances and see how God can use our struggles to help others, it opens up space for joy to grow.

What brings “calm delight” to your life? When you’re going through tough times, it can be helpful to remember those things—whether it’s a relationship, a memory, or even something simple, like a beautiful moment you witnessed. For Paul, it was his fellow believers. He was deeply encouraged by their faithfulness to the Gospel, and that gave him joy even in hardship. Sometimes, it’s focusing on the ways God is at work in others that help us regain our sense of peace and joy. Rejoicing in what God is doing in the lives of others can give us hope for what He will do for us because it reminds us of His faithfulness and power. When we see God working in someone else’s life—bringing healing, provision, or breakthroughs—it serves as a testimony of His ability and willingness to act on behalf of His people. This encourages us to trust that the same God who is working in others’ lives is also at work in ours, even if we don’t see immediate results.

Later in Philippians, Paul writes, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:4-7). What stands out to me here is the way Paul connects thanksgiving to peace. He doesn’t simply mention praying for needs; he emphasizes thanksgiving. When we choose to be thankful—even in difficult times—it leads us to a place of calm delight, which, in turn, invites God’s peace to guard our hearts.

When we focus too much on our needs or the challenges we face, it can be easy to lose sight of the joy we have in Christ. But when we focus on what we have to be thankful for, joy begins to flow more freely.

Paul had a larger view than what was happening at the moment. And that's crucial to understand. It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the difficulties we face are insurmountable or that our efforts are in vain. But Paul reminds us that God is at work even when we can't see it. In Philippians 1:7, he writes, "Whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the Gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me." Even though Paul was in prison, he knew that the work of the Gospel continued, and he found joy in knowing that he wasn't alone in that work.

Paul's confidence wasn't in his abilities or his immediate circumstances. His confidence was in God, who had begun a good work in him and the lives of those around him—and he trusted that God would bring it to completion. That's why he could say with assurance, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). This is a reminder that God's work in our lives is ongoing, and nothing—no trial, no setback—can derail it. When we place our confidence in God, it leads us to a place of joy that transcends our circumstances.

During the Napoleonic Wars, a French general named Massena appeared with 18,000 troops before an Austrian town that had no means of defense. The town was on the verge of surrender when the pastor of the church reminded the townspeople that it was

Resurrection Sunday. He encouraged them to worship, trusting that God would take care of the situation. The people did, and as the church bells rang, the French soldiers heard them and assumed that the town was being relieved by an Austrian army. They quickly broke camp and fled. The joy and trust of the townspeople, expressed through their worship and thanksgiving, changed the course of that situation.¹⁹

When we find ourselves in difficult circumstances, it can be hard to find joy. But as we reflect on God's Word and His promises, we can choose calm delight. As Jeremiah says, "Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart" (Jeremiah 15:16). God's Word brings joy, even in the darkest times, and it's through thanksgiving and rejoicing in the Lord that we find peace.

Let this truth encourage you: the joy of the Lord is always available to you. When you focus on His work in your life and the lives of those around you, when you focus on what God is doing, joy will abound.

What Produces Joy in Suffering?

The question of how to experience joy in suffering is an important question to answer. Peter makes it clear right from the beginning in his letter to the churches of Asia Minor: the key to joy during hardship is hoping fully in the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3–13). This answer doesn't simply guide us on how to cope with pain, but how to find joy while enduring it. As we dive into the trials faced by the early church, we can see how their struggles, though

¹⁹They Heard the Bells. www.bible.org/illustration/they-heard-bells

different from ours in many ways, still hold valuable lessons for us today.

When you read through 1 Peter, you'll notice that the main theme is the intersection of grace and suffering. What's particularly interesting is that Peter doesn't focus primarily on the more obvious forms of persecution like imprisonment, beatings, or martyrdom—though believers certainly faced these trials. Instead, Peter speaks to a different kind of suffering: the alienation and public shame that came from standing firm in faith. Christians were ostracized by their families, mocked in public, and pressured by society to abandon their beliefs and conform to the surrounding culture. This kind of pressure, though more subtle, is something we can easily relate to today.

Consider, for example, the controversy surrounding Chick-fil-A, which has faced boycotts for years after the company president, Dan Cathy, made public statements affirming the Biblical definition of marriage.²⁰ This example reflects the social pressures that Peter was addressing—pressures that continue to challenge Christians today.

Peter writes that these trials have come “so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by

²⁰Todd Starnes. Poultry vs. Pinhead: New York City's mayor says boycott Chick-fil-A. May 5, 2016. www.foxnews.com/opinion/poultry-vs-pinhead-new-york-citys-mayor-says-boycott-chick-fil-a

fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:7).

Chosen for a Purpose

Peter’s letter is addressed to “God’s elect” (1 Peter 1:1), a term that encompasses all believers, whether they are facing public shame, economic hardship, or any other kind of trial. He reminds them that their identity as Christians—God’s chosen people—is not defined by how the world treats them but by the fact that God has chosen them. “You are exiles,” Peter writes, “scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1). The word “exiles” here suggests that Christians are not primarily citizens of this world, but of another Kingdom—a Kingdom that is yet to be fully realized.

Peter emphasizes the significance of our election, which is rooted in God’s foreknowledge (1 Peter 1:2). God, in His mercy, has set His love upon us, and He has done so not because of our worth or actions, but because of His grace. In other words, God’s choice of us has nothing to do with our track record. It is based entirely on His plan of redemption through Christ.

Three key elements of our election stand out:

1. **God’s Foreknowledge:** Our election is rooted in God’s eternal plan. It is not a random choice, but a deliberate act of love from a sovereign God.
2. **Sanctification by the Spirit:** Our election is made manifest in our sanctification—the ongoing process of being conformed to the image of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

3. Cleansing by the Blood of Jesus: The purification we experience is through the blood of Jesus. It is by His sacrifice on the cross that we are made clean, and our sins are forgiven.

Peter underscores that this election leads to a life of obedience—not as a mere external conformity to rules, but as a deep, internal response to God’s grace. It’s a type of obedience that comes from the heart, grounded in faith in Christ, and marked by the sprinkling of His blood.

A Living Hope

Peter writes, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy, He has given us new birth into a living hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). This “living hope” is what makes all the difference in the life of a believer. It is a hope that is grounded in the Resurrection of Jesus, the cornerstone of our faith.

What is this living hope? It is the hope of eternal life with God, secured by the Resurrection of Jesus. This hope isn’t theoretical or wishful thinking—it is a confident expectation rooted in the finished work of Christ. For the believer, it is the certainty that, no matter what happens in this life, our future with God is assured.

Peter continues, “And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is kept in Heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:4-5). The inheritance we receive in Christ is imperishable,

unfading, and kept by the power of God. Our salvation is secure, and this reality fuels our joy. The suffering we face in this life cannot touch the inheritance that awaits us.

Two Reasons for Joy in Suffering

Now, back to the question of “what produces joy in the midst of suffering?” According to Peter, there are two primary reasons we can rejoice even in hardship.

1. The Promise of a Great Future

The first reason for joy is that we have a guaranteed future with God. Peter points to the promises in verses 3–5: We’ve been born again into a living hope, we have an imperishable inheritance, and God is protecting us through faith. No matter what trials we face today, we know that our future with God is secure. This future gives us reason to rejoice, even during pain. Our joy is grounded in the confidence that God’s promises will come to pass.

2. God’s Plan for Our Trials

The second reason we can rejoice is that God uses our trials for a purpose. Peter writes, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:6-7). The trials we face aren’t meaningless; they serve to refine our faith. They prepare us for the fullness of our inheritance and deepen our joy when we experience it.

As John Piper puts it, "Christianity is a life of tremendous joy first because we have a great and fail-safe future to look forward to beyond all our distresses, and second because God has a design to increase our joy in that future by means of all our distresses."²¹

The Inexpressible Joy of Salvation

Peter reminds us that though we have not seen Jesus, we love Him. Though we do not see Him now, we believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy (1 Peter 1:8). This joy is tied to the salvation of our souls, the great work that Christ has accomplished for us. As we experience this salvation, we grow in faith, love, and joy.

The prophets and even the angels longed to see what we now experience: the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ. And so, Peter urges us to set our hope fully on this grace, to live in the light of what God has already done and what He will do when Christ is revealed in glory.

Hope Fully in Grace

So, what produces joy amid suffering? The answer is simple but profound: "Hope fully in the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ." This hope is a living, active confidence in the promises of God, grounded in the Resurrection of Jesus. Our joy is rooted in the future glory that awaits us and in the present reality that God is using our trials to refine us, strengthen our faith, and prepare us for the fullness of that glory.

²¹John Piper. Joy through the Fiery Test of Genuine Faith. October 24, 1993.

As aliens and strangers in this world, we are called to live with this hope. It is a hope that sustains us, strengthens us, and fills us with joy, even in the most difficult circumstances. And with this hope, we can say with confidence: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In light of the context of 1 Peter—where the early Christians were scattered, facing suffering, alienation, and persecution—it’s clear that the believers’ ability to experience joy wasn’t tied to their circumstances. Instead, their joy was rooted in something far deeper: their identity in Christ, the inheritance awaiting them, and the living hope they held through the Resurrection of Jesus.

Now, as we reflect on these truths, it’s important to recognize that, just like those early believers, we too can cultivate a grateful, rejoicing heart—even in our challenges and struggles. The question is: How can we, in our own day-to-day lives, actively foster this kind of joy that Peter speaks of? Here are some practical steps for cultivating a heart that rejoices in the Lord, no matter what life brings:

1. Fix Your Eyes on Jesus the Source of Your Eternal Hope

Peter reminds the believers that their inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in Heaven for them (1 Peter 1:4). This future hope—our ultimate salvation, the promise of eternal life with God—becomes the foundation for joy in the present. When we set our eyes on Jesus and what He has made available to us including the promise of eternity, it puts the trials of this life into perspective. The

temporary hardships we face on Earth cannot compare to the glory that awaits us in Heaven (Romans 8:18).

Practical step: Start each day by reminding yourself of your eternal inheritance. Reflect on the truth that God has secured a future for you, one that is beyond anything this world can offer. You might even write down a verse like 1 Peter 1:4 or Romans 8:18 to meditate on when you're feeling overwhelmed.

2. Focus on the Work of God in Your Life

Peter emphasizes that the trials we face serve a purpose—they test the genuineness of our faith and refine us like gold refined by fire (1 Peter 1:7). Our suffering isn't meaningless; God uses it to deepen our faith and purify us. When we recognize that God is at work in our lives, even through difficulties, it shifts our perspective from self-pity to thanksgiving.

Practical step: Practice looking for God's hand in your circumstances. Even in the hardest moments, ask yourself, "What is God teaching me through this?" Take note of how He's using challenges to strengthen your character and deepen your trust relationship with Him.

3. Pray with Thanksgiving: Cultivate an Attitude of Gratitude

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul urges believers to "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." A grateful heart, even in difficulty, has a deep well of joy to draw from. Gratitude turns our attention from what we don't have to what we do have—chiefly, the grace of God in our

lives. This simple act of thankfulness can break through negativity and lift our hearts in joy.

In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul urges us to pray about everything, with thanksgiving, and the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds. Prayer is a direct path to joy, especially when it's combined with gratitude. When we bring our needs and worries to God but do so with thanksgiving, it shifts our focus from what we lack to the abundance of God's grace.

Practical step: When you pray, make it a point to start with thanksgiving. Acknowledge God's goodness, His provision, and His faithfulness. Then, bring your requests to Him, trusting that He will meet your needs according to His will.

Start a gratitude journal. Each day, write down three things you're thankful for—big or small. This practice helps train your heart to notice God's blessings, even in hard times, and fosters a heart of joy that celebrates His goodness. Share these blessings with others.

4. Rejoice in the Gospel Daily

In 1 Peter, Peter reminds believers that the prophets and even angels longed to understand the salvation that has been revealed to us (1 Peter 1:10-12). The Gospel is the foundation of our joy, and when we remind ourselves daily of the grace we've received through Jesus, it fills our hearts with overflowing joy. It's not just a one-time event, but a reality to rejoice in every day.

Practical step: Preach the Gospel to yourself every day. Remind yourself of the salvation you have in

Christ, the forgiveness of your sins, and the new life He has given you. Reflect on the magnitude of God's love and how it has changed your life.

5. Embrace Community and Fellowship

In 1 Peter, Peter speaks to the shared identity of the believers—they were “elect exiles” together, walking this journey as a family. When facing trials, the community of believers offers strength, encouragement, and shared joy. There is something powerful about rejoicing together in the Lord, whether it's through prayer, worship, or simply sharing life.

Practical step: Engage with your church community or a small group. Share your struggles and celebrate God's work in each other's lives. Spend time encouraging others, and let them encourage you. Rejoicing together can lift your heart and build joy in ways that isolation can't.

Chapter 3

Joy (chará) - The Strength in Celebration

Small Group Questions

1. Considering Paul's example of rejoicing in prison, what are some practical ways we can choose joy, even during challenges?

2. What steps can we take to deepen our relationship with Jesus and experience a lasting joy that doesn't depend on what's happening around us?

3. How does understanding that our joy is rooted in the finished work of Jesus change the way we respond to difficult circumstances? Reflecting on Paul's example in prison, how can we choose to focus on God's work in others or the bigger picture of His kingdom, even when our situations are challenging?

4. What role does thanksgiving play in our ability to experience joy, even in times of hardship? In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul encourages us to pray with thanksgiving in everything. How does shifting our focus from anxiety to gratitude change our perspective and help us find peace and joy, even in trials?

5. How can shifting our focus from our struggles to the ways God might be using our hardships to advance His kingdom help us experience joy and peace in suffering?

6. How can reminding ourselves daily of our eternal inheritance in Christ change the way we experience and respond to suffering in our lives?

Chapter 4
Peace (eirénē) - The Calm in the Storm



The Nature of True Peace is Found in Christ

True peace is one of the most profound gifts that Christ offers to those who follow Him. It's a peace that surpasses understanding, something the world cannot give or take away. In a world filled with turmoil, anxiety, and conflict, the peace found in Christ is not merely an absence of trouble, but a deep, abiding assurance that God is sovereign and faithful, even in the midst of life's hardest moments.

Grace is the Foundation of Our Peaceful Lives

In the opening greeting of 2 Thessalonians 1:2, Paul writes, "Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Notice that grace always comes first, followed by peace. It's no accident that Paul places grace before peace in his letters. Grace, I believe, is the foundation that leads to peace. Until we experience God's grace, we can't truly understand or experience His peace.

Theologian J. Hampton Keathley III puts it well when he defines grace as "the work of God for man, encompassing everything we receive from God."²² This includes peace — peace that comes not through our efforts or accomplishments, but as a gift from God.

In Greek, the word for grace, "charis", carries rich connotations — it refers to that which brings joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, and loveliness.²³ It speaks of God's unmerited favor, His kindness poured out on us even though we don't deserve it.

²²J. Hampton Keathley III. Grace: Why It's So Amazing and Awesome. www.bible.org/article/grace-why-it's-so-amazing-and-awesome
²³www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5485/kjv/tr/0-1/

Paul often emphasizes that grace is the gift of salvation we receive through Christ. This grace doesn't just save us from sin's penalty; it becomes the ongoing foundation of our relationship with God throughout eternity. Every blessing, every good thing, is a result of God's grace.

Missionary Don Richardson, in his book "The Peace Child", tells a fascinating story from his time among the primitive tribes in Papua New Guinea. He describes how two tribes, caught in a blood feud for generations, realized they could no longer continue fighting or risk destroying each other. After years of violence, they reached a peace agreement by offering a "peace child" — a child of one chief who was adopted by the opposing tribe. As long as that child lived, the tribes agreed to live in peace.

Richardson saw this as a powerful picture of God's grace — in much the same way, God sent His Son, the Prince of Peace, to end the enmity between us and Him. Through Christ, we are offered peace with God, not because we deserve it, but because God made a way for us to be reconciled to Him through His Son.²⁴

So, what is peace, exactly? The Greek word for peace in 2 Thessalonians 1:2 is "eirēnē", which encompasses security, safety, and prosperity.²⁵ But it's more than just an absence of conflict. Peace is about being made whole, being set right with God, and finding true contentment in Him.

²⁴Don Richardson. *The Peace Child. An Unforgettable Story of Primitive Jungle Treachery in the 20th Century.* Bethany House Publishers. August 8, 2005.

²⁵www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1515/kjv/tr/0-1/

In recent years, we've all experienced how easily peace can be disrupted. Think back to the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic — when we were all asked to shelter in place, flatten the curve, and wipe down our groceries with disinfectant. The fear and uncertainty created by the pandemic threatened our peace. Every moment seemed like a test of our security and safety. We didn't just fear the virus itself, but the potential loss of our peace — our normal routines, our ability to connect with others, and our sense of stability.

But as I reflect on that time, I realize something profound: If grace leads to peace, then peace holds onto what grace gives. When my life was upended, and everything around me seemed uncertain, I found that God's grace raised my level of contentment. Things that occupied much of my time were suddenly unavailable. What remained was a stillness in my soul, a deeper prayer life, more meaningful time spent with family in my own house, and a growing sense of grace and peace from God.

Grace and peace, Paul tells us, are not things we can manufacture on our own. They come "from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The Greek word for "from" in 2 Thessalonians 1:2 is "apo", which speaks to the origin or source of something.²⁶ In other words, God is the ultimate source of peace in our lives. This is crucial to understand, because if peace depended on external circumstances — if it came from our own efforts, from other people, or from our surroundings

²⁶www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g575/kjv/tr/0-1/

— we would be helpless when life throws challenges our way.

Take, for example, the common desire to find peace by escaping to a beautiful place in nature. I've had my share of "peace-filled" moments in stunning locations. But I've also found that, even in those beautiful places, peace doesn't automatically follow. Nature may be calming, but it's not the source of my peace. It's the time spent with God in those places — the stillness of my soul as I connect with Him — that brings peace. I could be standing in the middle of a storm and still experience peace because peace is found in the unshakable presence of God.

Peter, in both of his letters, also emphasizes the importance of receiving grace and peace. He writes, "May grace and peace be multiplied to you" (1 Peter 1:2, 2 Peter 1:2). The verb behind "be multiplied" means "to increase" — to move from lesser to greater.²⁷ This shows us that grace and peace can grow in our lives. They are not static, but dynamic, and can increase as we grow in our relationship with God.

I'll never forget a vacation with my family several years ago. We had just arrived at our rental condo in Florida, and I was already feeling stressed from the journey to get there. Traveling with kids can do that to a person — it's like the peace starts draining out of you the moment you leave the house. As we were finally settling in and stress was starting to subside, my phone rang. It was a call from someone in my church, letting me know that their spouse had just

²⁷www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4129/kjv/tr/0-1/

passed away, and they needed support. I spent a lot of time ministering to them over the phone, and by the time I hung up, I was emotionally drained and the little peace I had was gone. I knew I had to reset and decompress. I stepped outside with my family, took a deep breath, and paused to pray. In that moment, I reminded myself of something crucial: peace is something God multiplies. The situation around me hadn't changed. The stress and grief were still there. But in that quiet moment, I let the truth settle in — God's peace doesn't depend on my circumstances, it grows in me through His grace. And sure enough, it did. I was able to find a fresh sense of peace in God's presence, one that restored my soul and steadied my heart.

How do we receive this increase of grace and peace? The answer is simple but profound: through the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The more we learn of Him, the more we grow in our relationship with Him, the more we understand His perfect work on the cross, and the more we position ourselves to receive God's grace and peace in greater measure.

In 2 Peter 1:3, Peter tells us that God has given us "everything we need for life and godliness" through the knowledge of Jesus. This means that everything we need for peace, contentment, and spiritual growth is found in Him. When we seek to know Jesus more, we receive grace and peace in greater measure.

But we also need to take time to pray, ask, and receive. We can pray, "Father, give me wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Jesus," and trust that as we do, grace and peace will be multiplied to us.

Paul's words in 2 Thessalonians 1:3 remind us that as grace and peace multiply in our lives, we also begin to grow in faith and love for others. When God's peace fills us, we naturally overflow in love for those around us. And as we grow in grace and peace, we begin to walk through life with quiet confidence, knowing that the God who is the source of all peace is with us every step of the way.

So, as we walk through life — with its ups and downs, its struggles and joys — let's remember: grace and peace are always available to us. They come from God. They cannot be manufactured. And they will increase as we grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. More grace. More peace. Always.

Peace with God

The foundation of true peace begins with reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. Before coming to faith, every person is separated from God due to sin. But through Christ's death on the cross and His Resurrection, believers are brought into a right relationship with God (Romans 5:1). This peace with God is the starting point of all other peace. It is the assurance that we are no longer enemies of God, but beloved children, safe in His grace. This reconciliation brings deep inner peace, knowing that our eternal standing is secure.

Romans 5:1 begins with the word "therefore," a signal that this verse is building on what Paul has just written. Whenever you see a "therefore" in Scripture, it's important to understand what it's there for. In this case, Paul is continuing his argument from Romans 4, where he explains how righteousness (right standing)

with God comes not through following the Law, but through faith—just like Abraham, whose faith was credited to him as righteousness (Romans 4:3).

This connection between Romans 4 and Romans 5 helps us understand the depth of what Paul is saying. Romans 4 shows us that peace with God doesn't come from obeying a set of rules or striving to live up to an impossible standard. Instead, it is a gift of grace, accessed through faith. This is why Paul says in Romans 5:1, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Peace with God is not just the absence of conflict or a temporary truce. It's a permanent, unshakable state of reconciliation between us and God. The Greek word used here for peace is "eirēnē", which can mean tranquility, wholeness, or harmony.²⁸ But it's not the kind of peace that comes and goes depending on circumstances. The peace we have with God is steadfast, grounded in the finished work of Christ, and it doesn't fluctuate with our emotions, our mistakes, or our life situation.

The second part of this verse says, "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Notice that it's not "we might have peace" or "we will have peace" in the future. It's a present reality. When we place our faith in Christ, we have peace with God right now. It's not something we have to earn, work for, or wait for. Peace is given, through Jesus, because of His sacrificial death and Resurrection. It is a finished

²⁸www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1515/kjv/tr/0-1/

work, and because of that, our standing with God is secure in Jesus.

Sometimes, though, we don't feel this peace. We might feel distant from God, especially when we sin, fail, or face hard circumstances. But here's the key: the peace with God that Paul talks about is not dependent on our feelings or our performance. When we mess up, we often feel like God is angry with us or distant, but that's a lie. Our sin doesn't change our status with God. The peace we have with Him is secure, not because of how good we are, but because of how perfect Christ is.

When we let our sin take center stage, we're elevating our wrongdoing above the finished work of Christ. We're saying, in essence, "What I've done is bigger than what Jesus did for me." And that robs us of peace. But peace with God is a permanent gift, one that's rooted in Christ's sacrifice, not our performance.

This peace, "eirēnē", is a state of being reconciled with God—our souls are at rest because we know we are accepted by Him. It's a peace that assures us that God is not mad at us, but rather, He is favorably disposed toward us. And because of that, we can stand firm, knowing we are safe and secure in His love.

In Romans 5:2, Paul continues, saying that through Jesus, we have "gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand." This means we are firmly planted in God's grace, His unmerited favor. This is such a profound truth. It's one thing to have peace with God, but it's another to realize that we have been placed in a position of favor with Him. We are standing

in grace right now, not because of anything we've done to deserve it, but because of Jesus.

This should lead us to boast in the hope of the glory of God. "Doxa", the word for "glory" here, refers to the weight, the majesty, the splendor of God.²⁹ It speaks of His goodness and greatness, but it also speaks of our future hope: that we will one day live in that glory. As believers, we are assured of our eternal future with Him, and this gives us hope in the present. No matter what we face today, we have a future with God, and that should fill us with joyful, confident expectations.

As believers in Jesus, we are adopted into God's family. We have a new identity, a new name, and a new legacy. We are firmly placed in God's grace, and this should cause us to rejoice and walk in the full hope of our salvation. We stand firm, not in our ability, but in His grace, and that is cause for boasting—not in ourselves, but in the glorious work of Jesus.

Another powerful part of Romans 5:2 is the word "histēmi", which means "to stand firm" or "to be established."³⁰ As Christians, we have been established in the grace of God. We are standing firm in the unshakable truth that we belong to Him. No matter what happens around us, we are secure in His love and grace. That knowledge gives us hope—hope that goes beyond our present circumstances. It's the kind of hope that Paul speaks about in Philippians 1:6, knowing that "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

²⁹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1391/kjv/tr/0-1/

³⁰www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2476/kjv/tr/0-1/

Hope in the Bible is not wishful thinking. It's an expectant, confident assurance of good things to come. As we grow in our understanding of God's love for us, we realize that we are not just surviving this life—we are living with the knowledge that God is for us, and He will see us through to the end.

This hope, this peace with God, is a foundation that allows us to live in a way that's radically different from the world. We don't have to fear or be anxious because we know that we belong to God, that we are firmly established in His grace, and that our future is secure.

So, whatever you are facing today—whether it's loss, uncertainty, or failure—remember that you have peace with God. You have been justified by faith, you stand in His grace, and you have a confident hope in His glory. Your peace is unshakable because it's rooted in Christ, and nothing can take that from you. This is the extraordinary gift of salvation—peace with God, unearned, secure, and eternal.

And with that peace, we can boast—not in ourselves, but in the hope we have in Christ. Our lives are marked by the assurance that God is for us, that His favor rests upon us, and that our future with Him is more glorious than we can imagine. That's something to boast about. That's something to walk in. And that's the kind of peace that can change everything.

This peace, this hope, and this grace are the foundations that allow us to live confidently and joyfully, knowing that we are secure in God's love and that we belong to Him forever. So, let that truth sink in deep: you have peace with God, and in that peace,

you have access to His abundant grace and a hope that will never fail.

Peace in Trials

Christ's peace is there for us in our trials. While the world's peace often comes from the absence of conflict or stress, the peace of Christ is rooted in the unchanging character of God. Jesus promised that in this world we would face tribulation, but He also assured us that He has overcome the world (John 16:33). This peace comes when we trust that God is sovereign over our circumstances and that He is working all things together for our good (Romans 8:28). Even when facing hardships, we can experience a sense of calm assurance, knowing that God's presence is with us, and His purposes are greater than our pain.

John 16:33: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Peace that Transcends Understanding

One of the most distinctive aspects of Christ's peace is that it transcends human understanding. It's a peace that doesn't make sense from a worldly perspective. How can someone experience peace when facing a health crisis, financial instability, or personal loss? It's because true peace is not found in our ability to control our circumstances, but in our trust in God's faithful care. The Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:6-7 that when we bring our anxieties to God in prayer, with thanksgiving, His peace will guard our hearts and minds—"a peace that transcends all

understanding.” This peace defies logic and cannot be explained in human terms, but it’s a peace that is experienced deeply in the heart.

Peace that Brings Wholeness

In the Bible, the Hebrew word for peace, “shalom”, carries a deep meaning that goes beyond the idea of tranquility. It refers to wholeness, completeness, and well-being.³¹ When Christ brings peace, He doesn’t just calm our fears or ease our anxieties; He restores what was broken and makes us whole. The peace of Christ brings healing to our hearts, restoring us spiritually, emotionally, and even physically. It’s a peace that mends the brokenness of life and brings us into a state of inner harmony, where we experience the fullness of God’s presence and purpose.

Letting the Peace of Christ Rule in Your Heart

In Colossians 3:15, Paul writes, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” I love how Paul connects peace to thankfulness here. It almost seems like he’s stating the obvious: if the peace of Christ is ruling in your heart, you can’t help but be thankful. I mean, it’s hard to imagine someone who has God’s peace living within them, yet walking around grumpy or ungrateful. Yet, as Christians, we’ve all experienced times when we’ve chosen ingratitude over peace—and that’s a sure sign that we’ve allowed something other than Christ’s peace to rule our hearts.

³¹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h7965/kjv/wlc/0-1/

The Greek word for peace is “eirénē”, and it takes on an even deeper meaning when we consider the peace that Christ offers. It’s not just a feeling of calm or serenity—it’s the peace that comes from salvation. Salvation “sozo”—is part of this peace. It means to save, keep safe, heal, and restore.³² This peace is multifaceted: it’s the kind of peace that saves, heals, and restores. It keeps us safe from harm, rescues us from danger, and restores our souls to health. This is the peace that we are called to let rule in our hearts.

When Paul says, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,” he’s inviting us to let the fullness of salvation—the wholeness and healing that comes with it— to govern our lives. Think about that for a moment: God’s peace is what brings healing to our minds, our emotions, our relationships, and our circumstances.

This is the kind of peace Jesus offers us. In John 16:33, He says, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” Jesus doesn’t promise a trouble-free life, but He does promise that His peace will sustain us through whatever comes because He has overcome the world.

The peace of Christ isn’t temporary. It’s not a peace that’s here one moment and gone the next. Jesus isn’t going to withdraw His peace from us. The question is, will we let it rule our hearts? This brings us to a crucial point: Letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts is a decision. It’s an active choice. We get to decide whether or not we will allow His peace to govern us.

³²www.biblehub.com/greek/4982.htm

The Greek word “brabeuō” is used here, which means “to decide” or “to rule.”³³ It’s like being an umpire in a baseball game, calling the shots. Life throws the ball our way, and we get to decide: will we let peace rule, or will we let anxiety, fear, or frustration take over?

When bad news comes, we’re faced with a choice. We can allow the peace of Christ to rule our hearts, or we can let worry and stress take charge. The peace of Christ doesn’t deny the reality of suffering or hardship; it simply invites us to view those things through the lens of God’s sovereignty and salvation. Yes, bad things happen, but in Christ, we have the hope of eternal peace. We are reminded of this in 2 Timothy 4:18, where Paul says, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to His heavenly Kingdom.” Paul, though persecuted and eventually martyred for his faith, found peace in knowing that God’s ultimate plan was to bring him to eternal peace in Heaven.

This is the kind of peace we’re called to: a peace that doesn’t just cover us in our immediate struggles but anchors us in the eternal promise of God’s presence. No matter what happens to us, we can choose to let peace rule. We can decide to allow it to govern our hearts, just as Paul did.

The True Meaning of Colossians 3:15

When we look at the original Greek text of Colossians 3:15, we find something interesting. The phrase “called to peace” doesn’t appear in the original manuscript. Instead, it reads: “Let the peace of Christ

³³www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1018/kjv/tr/0-1/

rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful.” This is a subtle but important difference because it connects the peace of Christ to the Body of Christ—the Church.

Paul is reminding us that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. As members of the Church, we are called to live in peace with one another. This peace isn’t just for our comfort; it’s for the collective well-being of the Body of Christ. When the peace of Christ rules in our hearts, it flows out into our relationships with others. And in this way, we contribute to the peace of the Church, helping to build one another up in love and unity.

This is why thankfulness is so closely tied to peace. When we recognize the gifts that others bring to the Body of Christ, we can be thankful not only for our calling but for the unique ways others contribute to the greater mission of the Church. It’s in this spirit of mutual gratitude that the peace of Christ truly thrives.

How Do We Let the Peace of Christ Rule?

So, how exactly do we let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts? Paul provides us with some practical steps in the next verses:

1. Dwell in the Message of Christ Richly

The more we immerse ourselves in the Gospel, the more God’s peace becomes a natural byproduct. The message of Christ—His life, death, Resurrection, and promises—is what anchors us in peace. It’s not about our circumstances; it’s about Christ and the hope He offers. In 2 Peter 1:3, we’re told that the knowledge of Jesus will lead to grace and peace being multiplied in

our lives. The more we understand who Christ is and what He accomplished for us, the more of His peace we will experience.

2. Admonish One Another with Wisdom from the Spirit

When we encourage others with the wisdom of God's Word, we also encourage ourselves. This mutual encouragement is a powerful way to strengthen the peace of Christ in our lives. The Holy Spirit works through us to minister peace to others, and in turn, we receive peace from those around us.

3. Sing to God with Gratitude in Your Hearts

Worship is a natural outflow of peace. When we sing to God with gratitude, our hearts are reminded of His goodness, and peace fills the space where anxiety once lived. Gratitude for God's blessings—big or small—aligns our hearts with His peace.

4. Do All in the Name of the Lord

When we approach every task, no matter how mundane, intending to do it for God's glory, we invite His peace into those moments. Whether it's washing dishes or completing a work assignment, doing everything in the name of Jesus helps us remain rooted in His peace.

5. Give Thanks to God Through Jesus in Prayer

Thankfulness is the antidote to anxiety. When we recognize all that God has done for us through Jesus—His grace, His mercy, His peace—we can't help but respond with gratitude. And as we give thanks in prayer, we make space for God's peace to rule in our hearts.

Peace that Unites

The peace of Christ also has a unifying power. In a world that often divides people along lines of race, nationality, religion, and ideology, the peace that Christ offers brings unity among believers. Ephesians 2:14 says that Jesus Himself is our peace, breaking down the walls of hostility between different people groups, and making them one in Him. This peace is not just individual but communal, drawing together people from all walks of life to live in harmony with one another as part of the Body of Christ.

Peace that Guards Our Hearts and Minds

Christ's peace acts as a guard or protector over our hearts and minds, especially amid anxiety, worry, or fear. Just as soldiers guard a city, the peace of Christ stands watch over our inner world, preventing negative emotions from overtaking us. When we bring our concerns to God, His peace stands guard, keeping our hearts steady and our minds focused on His truth. This protective peace allows us to rest in God's care and trust in His provision, no matter what external pressures we face.

Philippians 4:7 - "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

The Gift of Peace with One Another

Jesus not only provides peace with God and within ourselves, but He also calls us to live in peace with others. As believers, we are to be peacemakers in the world (Matthew 5:9), promoting reconciliation and forgiveness in relationships. Jesus taught us to forgive

as He has forgiven us, and when we extend that grace, we experience peace in our relationships. True peace with others is the fruit of a heart transformed by Christ's peace.

Matthew 5:9 - "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

The peace that Christ offers is not the fleeting or fragile peace that the world offers, but a deep, abiding peace that is rooted in His love, His sovereignty, and His grace. It's a peace that restores, unites, protects, and sustains us, regardless of our circumstances.

When we fix our eyes on Christ, trust in His promises, and rely on His presence, we experience a peace that transcends understanding—a peace that guards our hearts and minds and brings us true rest. This peace is a testimony of God's grace at work in our lives and a foretaste of the eternal peace we will one day experience in His presence forever.

Eliminating Anxiety with God's Peace

While the peace of Christ is a profound gift that stabilizes our hearts and minds, we also know that anxiety and worry are real struggles in our daily lives. Many of us face situations that provoke fear, doubt, and stress—whether it's relational conflict, financial concerns, health issues, or the pressure of living up to expectations. It's easy for anxiety to creep in. But the good news is that God's peace is specifically designed to eliminate anxiety and replace it with something far greater.

Christ's peace is not only a refuge from life's trials but also a remedy for the anxiety that so often

accompanies them. The Bible offers clear instructions on how to confront anxiety with God’s peace, and it reminds us that peace and anxiety cannot coexist in the believer’s heart when we trust in God’s promises. Understanding how God’s peace works to eliminate anxiety helps us experience true freedom and rest, even in the most challenging circumstances.

Steps to Invite God’s Peace into Our Lives

1. Bring Your Worries to God in Prayer and Meditate on His Word.

The first step in eliminating anxiety with God’s peace is to actively surrender our worries to God through prayer. In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul encourages us not to be anxious about anything but to bring everything to God through prayer and petition, with thanksgiving. This is a powerful act of trust—handing over our fears, concerns, and uncertainties to the One who holds the future. When we do this, God promises that His peace will guard our hearts and minds. It’s in this exchange—our anxiety for His peace—that we begin to experience a freedom that surpasses all understanding. The Apostle Peter urges us to “cast all our anxiety on Him (God) because He cares for us” (1 Peter 5:7). This isn’t just a metaphorical act, but a conscious decision to unload the burdens that weigh us down and place them in God’s hands. When we do this, we are acknowledging that we are not meant to carry these heavy burdens and that God is more than capable of handling them.

It’s important to remember that God is not indifferent to our struggles. He cares deeply about our pain and concerns, and He invites us to bring them to Him.

When we cast our anxiety on Him, we are letting go of control and trusting in His ability to provide peace and resolution, regardless of the outcome.

Meditation on Scripture—especially verses that focus on God’s promises of peace—allows us to align our minds with the truth of who God is. Psalm 119:165 says, “Great peace have those who love Your Law, and nothing can make them stumble.” When we immerse ourselves in God’s Word, we invite His peace to become the foundation of our thoughts and attitudes.

Psalm 46:10 - “Be still, and know that I am God.”

God’s peace will guard our hearts and minds by fixing our thoughts on God’s truth. The enemy of peace often works through lies, distortions, and fears that cloud our minds and fill us with anxiety. To combat this, we must intentionally focus on the truth of God’s Word. Use the helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17) by meditating on Jesus, and be filled with God’s wholeness, protection, healing, and soundness.

In Philippians 4:8, Paul gives us a clear directive: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” When we fill our minds with God’s truth, peace becomes the natural result.

Isaiah 26:3 - “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in You.”

2. Rest in God's Sovereignty and Control and Refocus Your Thoughts

Anxiety often arises when we lose sight of God's sovereignty and start focusing on the "what-ifs" of life. We begin to imagine worst-case scenarios and assume we are in control of outcomes, which only heightens our stress. But God's peace calls us to reframe our perspective and focus on His sovereignty. When we remember that God is in control of everything—every detail, every circumstance, every future event—we can begin to rest in the assurance that nothing takes God by surprise.

Jesus spoke directly to this in Matthew 6:25-34, where He reminded His followers that worrying about the future accomplishes nothing and that God cares deeply for His children. Just as He provides for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, we can trust that He will provide for us. Anxiety fades when we shift our focus from our circumstances to God's character and His promises to take care of us.

Matthew 6:34 - "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Much of our anxiety stems from the illusion that we must manage every detail of our lives and solve every problem on our own. True peace comes when we acknowledge that God is sovereign, and He is in control of every situation, even the ones that feel overwhelming to us.

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus invites us to come to Him with our burdens and find rest in Him. When we place

our trust in God's sovereign will, we can rest in the knowledge that He is working all things together for our good (Romans 8:28). This act of surrender opens the door for God's peace to flood our hearts.

Matthew 11:28-30 - "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

3. Be Thankful and Rejoice

A thankful heart is one of the greatest antidotes to anxiety. When we begin to focus on what we are thankful for, our hearts are lifted from anxiety to joy. Thankfulness shifts our focus from what we lack to what God has already provided. This simple practice can have a profound impact on our mental and emotional well-being.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Paul instructs us to rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances. The act of giving thanks, even in difficult times, cultivates a perspective of gratitude that counters the tendency to worry. When we rejoice in God's goodness and provision, we invite His peace to settle over our anxious hearts.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 - "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

4. Trust in God's Timing and Provision

Anxiety often stems from the fear of not having what we need when we need it. But true peace comes when we trust in God's perfect timing and provision. The

Bible tells us that God knows what we need before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8). His provision is always perfect and is never late. God's peace comes when we trust that He will supply everything we need, according to His riches and in His perfect timing. This trust alleviates the pressure to control outcomes and allows us to rest in His faithful provision.

Matthew 6:8 - "Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."

5. Live in Fellowship with Other Believers

Another powerful way to invite God's peace is through relationships. God designed us to live in community, and when we surround ourselves with fellow believers who share in the peace of Christ, it strengthens our own experience of peace. The Body of Christ is a place where we can share our burdens, pray for one another, and encourage each other in the Lord.

In Romans 12:18, Paul urges us to live at peace with everyone as much as it depends on us. This means not only fostering peace within ourselves but also contributing to peace in our relationships. When we live in harmony with others, our hearts are more open to receiving God's peace.

Romans 12:18 - "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

Inviting God's peace into our lives is a continuous, intentional process. Through prayer, gratitude, community, and obedience, we open our hearts to receive the peace that Christ freely offers. The more we fix our minds on God's truth and trust in His

sovereignty, the more we allow His peace to guard our hearts and minds.

God's peace isn't a fleeting moment or temporary fix; it's a deep, abiding sense of calm and security in knowing that we are His, and He is in control. By embracing these steps, we can invite God's peace to not only comfort us in our struggles but also to transform our lives, creating a foundation of peace that will stand firm regardless of our circumstances.

Chapter 4

Peace (eirénē) - The Calm in the Storm Small Group Questions

1. How does understanding that grace must come before peace impact the way you approach life's challenges? Reflect on a recent situation where peace felt elusive. How might experiencing or remembering God's grace in that moment change your response and allow God's peace to settle in?

2. In what ways can the peace of Christ, which is not dependent on circumstances, reshape how we view difficult or uncertain times? How have you experienced God's peace in a situation where your external circumstances were far from peaceful? What can you do to position yourself to receive more of God's peace in future challenges?

3. How does the truth that our peace with God is secure, regardless of our performance, change the way we respond to sin or failure in our lives? When you feel distant from God due to mistakes or hardship, how can you remind yourself of the unshakable peace that comes through Christ's finished work?

4. In what ways does understanding that the peace of Christ is meant to "rule" in our hearts challenge how we respond to conflict or stress in our daily lives? How can you actively choose to let the peace of Christ govern your emotions and reactions when life feels chaotic or overwhelming? What might that look like in practical terms?

5. How can we actively choose to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts when faced with anxiety, fear, or difficult circumstances? What are some practical ways we can remind ourselves of God's sovereignty and the eternal peace we have in Christ, especially during times of trial or uncertainty?

6. What are some practical ways we can shift our focus from anxiety to trust in God's perfect timing and provision, especially when we feel overwhelmed by life's uncertainties? How can we remind ourselves to receive God's peace as a gift, rather than trying to achieve peace on our own, and how does this change the way we approach challenges?

Chapter 5
Patience (makrothymía) - Waiting with Purpose



Patience and Love: The Synergy of Waiting with Purpose

Patience is often described as the ability to endure delay, suffering, or provocation without becoming angry or upset. But in the Bible “patience” (makrothymía) is more than just passive endurance; it is a form of active waiting that aligns with the will of God, characterized by long-suffering love.³⁴

The Apostle Paul, in his famous description of love in 1 Corinthians 13, begins by stating, “Love is patient”. Patience is not just a quality of love; it is foundational to its nature. But how does patience tie into love, and how is this reflected in the life of Jesus?

The Depth of Patience in Love

Love, as a theological virtue, is not just a feeling or an isolated action. It is a continual, sustaining force that seeks the well-being of others over time. Patience, therefore, becomes the practical outworking of love when faced with frustration, delay, or difficulty.

For Jesus, love and patience are inseparable. In the Gospels, we see a Christ who, despite the countless ways He was provoked—by His disciples, the religious leaders, and even the crowds—remains steadfast, slow to anger, and merciful. His love never grows weary; it is an enduring, active force that allows Him to wait for the right time, and to bear with the failings and misunderstandings of others.

³⁴www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3115/kjv/tr/0-1/

When we consider “makrothymía” in the context of Jesus’ patience, it is not merely the absence of reaction—it is the intentional presence of grace. In Greek, “makrothymía” means “long temper”, which evokes the image of someone who takes a long time to become angry, someone who extends mercy over long periods.

Jesus’ Patience: A Model for Us

Jesus’ life is a perfect reflection of love’s patience. Throughout His ministry, He waits patiently for the right moments to teach, heal, and reveal the fullness of God’s Kingdom. Jesus often chose to teach in parables because they were simple stories with layers of deeper meaning. He didn’t immediately give all the answers but invited His listeners into a process of reflection and understanding. In this way, His method models patience, both in the way He teaches and in how He expects His followers to engage with His teachings. Jesus’ patience is not passive; it’s purposeful waiting. This is seen clearly in the way He interacts with people. Whether with the Samaritan woman at the well, Zacchaeus the tax collector, or Peter who denies Him three times, Jesus’ patience is active—and it leads to transformation.

Perhaps one of the clearest demonstrations of this is seen in Jesus’ final hours, especially during His trial and crucifixion. Instead of reacting in wrath or retaliating against His accusers, He endures with a purpose: to bring salvation to humanity. His patience in the face of injustice was a deep, purposeful act of love. He didn’t wait in resignation but with a clear understanding of why He was enduring. His love was not in a rush, and His patience flowed from His unwavering commitment to redeem and restore.

In Luke 9:51, the Gospel notes that “As the time approached for Him to be taken up to Heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” This phrase, “resolutely set out”, demonstrates focused, purposeful patience. He knew what lay ahead, and His actions were always in line with His mission, not driven by impatience or frustration. Jesus was not passive in His waiting; He was actively waiting for the right time to fulfill God’s will.

Patience as a Key Element of Discipleship

For the believer, patience is not simply an attribute to be admired in Jesus, but one to be cultivated. If Jesus is the personification of love, and love is patient, then to follow Jesus means to embody patience in our relationships with others, even in times of provocation or when our circumstances challenge us.

This kind of patience, as modeled by Christ, requires both a long view and an inner transformation. It asks us to wait with purpose, as Jesus did—whether in the waiting for God’s timing in our lives, in enduring the faults and weaknesses of others, or in the active love of those who may not deserve it. Patience is not a passive waiting for things to change; it is waiting in love for God’s purpose to unfold.

The Spiritual Fruit of Patience

As the Fruit of the Spirit, patience is cultivated through a relationship with Jesus. When we are rooted in His love, we find the strength to endure not just for the sake of enduring, but in a way that honors God and serves others. Patience becomes a tool in God’s hands to shape our character, deepen our trust, and align us with His will.

Patience is not merely the ability to wait—it is the intentional choice to wait with purpose. For Jesus, His patience was a deliberate outpouring of His love for us, demonstrating that love often requires waiting. As we seek to model our lives after Him, we are called to reflect this same patience, not just as a virtue but as a way of living out His love in the world.

In essence, when love is patient, it reflects the deep, sacrificial heart of Christ—a love that waits for the fullness of God’s plan to unfold, a love that bears with others, and a love that never gives up. As we practice patience, we are participating in the very love that Jesus modeled for us, waiting with hope and purpose, trusting that God is working in and through us, even in our waiting.

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps. “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth.” When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:21-23).

In this passage, the Apostle Peter highlights how Christ’s suffering and patience under injustice serve as an example for us. Despite being falsely accused, insulted, and mistreated, Jesus did not retaliate but entrusted Himself to God the Father. This passage teaches us that in our suffering or moments of injustice, we are to look to Christ as our model and follow His example of patience and trust in God.

Christ's life and ministry provide numerous examples of how He modeled patience for us. His patience is evident in both His interactions with people and His endurance through suffering.

1. Patience with His Disciples

- One of the clearest demonstrations of Jesus' patience with His disciples is seen in John 14:8-11, when Philip, one of His closest followers, still struggled to understand who Jesus truly was. After years of being with Jesus and hearing Him teach, Philip asked, "Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us" (John 14:8). At this moment, Philip's request revealed his lack of understanding that Jesus Himself was the full revelation of the Father. Instead of rebuking Philip or expressing frustration, Jesus responded with deep patience: "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father... Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me" (John 14:9)? Jesus did not dismiss Philip's request as foolish; instead, He patiently explained the profound truth that He and the Father were one. This exchange not only highlights Jesus' patience but also His gentle, yet persistent, way of drawing His disciples into a deeper understanding of who He was. Even when they faltered in their faith or comprehension, He continued to teach with grace, inviting them to grow in their relationship with Him.

- Peter's Denial: Jesus knew that Peter would deny Him three times before the crucifixion (Luke 22:61-62), and yet Jesus showed patience, knowing that Peter would eventually repent and be restored. His grace toward Peter later, especially in John 21:15-19, where He reinstates Peter after his denial, shows profound patience.

2. Patience with Sinners and the Marginalized

-The Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1-11):
When a woman caught in adultery was brought before Jesus, the crowd expected Him to judge her harshly. Instead, Jesus responded with patience and wisdom, telling those without sin to cast the first stone. His calm and patient response not only saved the woman but also convicted the accusers, showing His restraint and mercy.

- The Tax Collector Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10):
Zacchaeus, a tax collector known for his dishonesty, climbed a tree to see Jesus. Instead of condemning him for his sins, Jesus patiently called Zacchaeus down and went to his house, offering him grace and the opportunity for repentance. His approach highlights His willingness to patiently engage with those whom society often rejects.

3. Patience in Suffering

- The Passion and Crucifixion: Jesus displayed immense patience during His trial and crucifixion. In Luke 23:34, as He was being crucified, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Despite the physical and emotional pain, He patiently endured the suffering for the sake of humanity's redemption.

- Silent Before His Accusers (Matthew 27:12-14):
When Jesus was accused by the chief priests and elders, He didn't answer them (Matthew 27:12-14). His silence was a demonstration of His patience, not reacting to the unjust accusations but trusting in God's ultimate justice.

4. Patience with the Slow Progress of God's Kingdom

- The Parables of Growth (Mark 4:26-29, Luke 13:18-21): In His teachings, Jesus often likened the Kingdom of God to seeds growing slowly over time. In the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Luke 13:18-19), He spoke of the small, slow-growing mustard seed becoming a great tree, showing that the Kingdom of God's work would often be unseen and slow, but ultimately, it would be fulfilled. Jesus exemplified patience, trusting in the Father's timing for the growth of the Kingdom.

- Delayed Response to Lazarus' Illness (John 11:1-44): When Jesus learned that His friend Lazarus was ill, He chose not to immediately go to him. Instead, He waited for Lazarus to die before He arrived. His decision to wait and allow Lazarus' death served to reveal His power over death, but also illustrated His trust in God's perfect timing and patience with the unfolding of God's plan.

5. Patience with People Who Were Healed and Yet Were Slow in Faith (John 9):

- In John 9:3, Jesus says, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," He responded to the disciples' question about the cause of the man's blindness, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

Here, Jesus isn't giving a philosophical or theological explanation of suffering in general; instead, He redirects the focus. The disciples wanted to know "why" the man was blind, searching for a cause, something in the past that had led to his condition.

But Jesus teaches them that suffering often can't be explained simply by tracing it back to a specific sin or wrongdoing. His answer redefines the question. Rather than looking back at causes, Jesus invites them to look forward to purpose. He reveals that the blindness was not a result of sin, but an opportunity for God's works to be displayed.

Jesus doesn't deny the reality of sin and suffering in the world. He acknowledges that "all suffering" is in some way a consequence of the fall (Genesis 3, Romans 8:18–25), but He encourages us to look beyond the origins of suffering. He challenges us to consider its purpose. In this case, Jesus points to the future: the work of God's glory will be displayed through the healing of this man's blindness. This is a reminder for us—sometimes, we spend too much energy asking, "Why is this happening?" when what we need to focus on is "What can God do through this?"

God didn't send suffering as a punishment for a specific sin, but He used it as an opportunity to reveal His power. In the same way, the difficulties we face in life—whether sickness, loss, or struggle—can be moments for God to demonstrate His glory, His redemption, and His healing. Jesus reveals that even when we can't trace the reason for our suffering, we can trust that God has a purpose for it, even if that purpose is only revealed later.

Jesus then adds in John 9:4-5, "As long as it is day, we must do the works of Him who sent Me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." These words mark a critical shift. Jesus is teaching about the urgency of His mission—the day is still here, but night is coming.

His time on Earth is limited, and He is committed to completing the works His Father has given Him. Jesus, the Light of the World, is fully aware of the impending darkness of His crucifixion, which will soon limit His physical presence with His followers. But He is also making it clear that now, while He is here, is the time to act. His patience isn't just passive endurance; it's focused, purposeful waiting to fulfill God's will.

When He says, "Night is coming," it's a statement that foreshadows the closing of His earthly ministry and the ultimate sacrifice of the cross. In this case, Jesus is pointing to His coming death and the time when His earthly ministry would cease. The "day" represents opportunity—the time when people can receive the light of Christ. The "night" represents the moment when that opportunity will be lost.

For us today, the "day" is still here—the opportunity to experience God's work of redemption and healing is still available. But just as night came for Jesus, there will come a time when that opportunity is no longer open. So, Jesus calls us to act now, to be part of His work while we still can. The light of Christ is in us, and it is our mission to bring that light to others, to let them see the power of God through our lives.

In this journey, we are called not only to act but to patiently follow God's leading in the things He has prepared in advance for us to do. His timing and direction are perfect, even when it doesn't align with our expectations.

By waiting on Him, we open ourselves to His guidance—trusting that He knows the right moment to act, the right way to serve, and the people to touch with His love. Our role is to remain faithful, to be alert and ready to respond when He calls, knowing that every step of obedience is part of His redemptive plan. As we follow His lead, we become instruments of His light, pointing others to the hope, healing, and salvation found in Jesus.

Jesus Doesn't Engage in the Blame Game

When faced with suffering or hardship, how often do we find ourselves playing the “blame game”? Why is this happening to me? What did I do to deserve this? These are natural questions, but Jesus calls us to move beyond them. The disciples wanted an explanation for the blindness based on a past cause—was it because of sin? Jesus reframes the question, shifting the focus away from blame and toward the present purpose of God's work.

Jesus doesn't want us to be preoccupied with what went wrong, what sin caused our difficulties, or what we should or shouldn't have done. Instead, He calls us to look to the future with hope and purpose. In the face of hardship, Jesus wants us to fix our eyes on the solution: Himself. He is the one who offers healing, restoration, and purpose—even in the most painful circumstances. Through His cross, He has already dealt with our sins, and through His Resurrection, He offers us His abundant life.

The Miracle of Healing and Redemption

After speaking these words, Jesus did something extraordinary, He spit on the ground, made mud with His saliva, and applied it to the man's eyes (John 9:6). At first glance, this seems strange and almost absurd. Why use mud? Why apply it in such an unconventional manner? But there's a deep significance in what Jesus is doing.

Jesus is demonstrating that He has authority over the very elements of creation. The man's blindness, which was a result of the fall of creation, is not something that can be solved by the laws of creation alone. But Jesus, as the Redeemer, can undo the effects of the fall. The creation, in its brokenness, cannot heal the blind. But redemption—the work of Jesus our Redeemer—can.

The pool of Siloam, to which Jesus sends the man, is also rich in symbolism. The name "Siloam" means "Sent,"³⁵ referring to Jesus, the One who was sent by the Father to redeem and heal. When the blind man washed in the pool, he didn't just wash dirt from his eyes—he received the healing power of the One who was sent for him. Jesus, the sent One, is the source of true healing, both physical and spiritual.

In the same way, we are called to go to the "Sent One" for our healing. Jesus came to redeem us, to break the curse of sin and suffering in our lives. True healing, lasting restoration, and spiritual salvation come through Jesus Christ, who was sent to redeem us from all that the fall of creation brought into the world.

³⁵www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4611/kjv/tr/0-1/

The Five Conversations Leading to Spiritual Salvation

The healing of the blind man didn't end with his physical sight being restored. What Jesus did in this man's life—giving him physical sight—was the first step toward opening his spiritual eyes. There are five key conversations in the narrative that move the blind man toward full spiritual salvation. These conversations are opportunities for Jesus' grace to work in his heart, and they also show the progression of his faith.

1. Conversation 1: With the Neighbors (John 9:8-12)
At first, the man only knows Jesus as "the man" who healed him. His understanding of Jesus is limited but growing.
2. Conversation 2: With the Pharisees (John 9:13-17)
The Pharisees question the man and his healing, and he begins to understand that Jesus is more than just a man—He is "a prophet".
3. Conversation 3: With His Parents (John 9:18-23)
His parents refuse to speak fully about Jesus because of fear, but this does not deter the man. His faith is becoming stronger.
4. Conversation 4: With the Pharisees Again (John 9:24-34)
In this conversation, the man stands courageously against the Pharisees, boldly stating that Jesus must be from God. His faith is solidifying.
5. Conversation 5: With Jesus (John 9:35-38)

Finally, Jesus meets this man again and reveals Himself as “the Son of Man”. At this moment, the man’s spiritual sight is fully opened, and he declares, “Lord, I believe,” and worships Him.

These conversations reveal the gradual unfolding of the man’s faith and the patience displayed by Jesus. The formerly blind man moves from seeing Jesus as just “a man” to recognizing Him as “a prophet”, and finally, to acknowledge Him as “the Son of Man”.

Ultimately, what began as physical healing became a spiritual awakening. Jesus was not merely restoring the man’s physical sight; He was opening his eyes to the truth of who He is. This is the goal of all of God’s works—His miracles point to the ultimate revelation of Himself.

6. The Unbelief of the People of Nazareth (Mark 6:1-6): Jesus was rejected by the people in His hometown of Nazareth.

Despite their lack of faith and hostility, He patiently continued His ministry elsewhere. Even when His own people did not accept Him, He did not force Himself on them but respected their freedom while continuing to preach the Gospel.

The First Visit to Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30; Mark 6:1-6): Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath and read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He declared that He was the fulfillment of the prophecy about the coming Messiah. He said, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).

- Initial amazement: The people were initially amazed at His words, but their astonishment quickly turned to skepticism. They began to question His authority, saying, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:22), implying that they knew Him as a local boy, the carpenter's son, and couldn't fathom that He was the Messiah.

- Jesus' patient response: Jesus, sensing their doubt and unbelief, reminded them of how prophets are often rejected in their hometowns. He also alluded to Elijah and Elisha's ministry to Gentiles during times when Israel itself was in need, suggesting that God's message and blessings were not limited to Israel alone (Luke 4:24-27).

- Rejection and attempt to kill Jesus: The people became furious at His words, perhaps because they felt personally offended or threatened by the implications of His message. They tried to seize Him and throw Him off a cliff, but He miraculously walked through the crowd and went on His way (Luke 4:28-30).

The Second Visit to Nazareth (Matthew 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6):

- Another visit, more rejection: In Matthew and Mark, it's noted that Jesus returned to Nazareth at a later point in His ministry. This time, the rejection was even more pronounced.

- Continued skepticism: The people still saw Jesus as the son of the carpenter, and they took offense at His wisdom and the miracles He performed (Matthew 13:55-57, Mark 6:3). They struggled to reconcile His humble origins with His growing reputation as a teacher and miracle worker.

- Jesus' patient response: Jesus again remarked that "a prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home" (Matthew 13:57, Mark 6:4). He also noted that their lack of faith prevented Him from performing many miracles there (Mark 6:5-6).

- Limited miracles: While Jesus did heal a few sick people, the lack of faith in Nazareth hindered the full display of His miraculous power.

7. Patience with Prayer and Intercession

- The Parable of the Persistent Friend (Luke 11:5-8).

In Luke 11, Jesus tells a story about a friend knocking on his neighbor's door in the middle of the night, asking for bread. On the surface, it sounds like a fairly simple, relatable scenario: "Suppose you have a friend who comes to your house at midnight and says, "Lend me three loaves of bread." We can all picture this situation. Imagine it: you're sound asleep, and a friend (who may or may not have binge-watched an entire season of something on Netflix) unexpectedly shows up at your door at midnight, hungry, asking for a few loaves of bread.

Now, if this happened in today's world, you'd probably ask, "Why didn't you just go to the 24-hour grocery store?" But let's reflect on the culture of this day. People didn't have the convenience of 24-hour stores or even the luxury of knowing when a guest might arrive at their home. Hospitality was a sacred duty. The moment someone arrived at your doorstep—whether you had prepared for them or not—you were expected to offer them food and shelter.

This brings us to verse 6: "A friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him." In Jesus' time, travel was often arduous and unpredictable. Guests didn't give advance notice of their arrival; they could show up at any hour, even late at night, without warning, and without a place to stay. As a host, it was expected that you would open your door and provide hospitality, even if it was well past midnight and your food supplies were low.

This scenario was not out of the ordinary—it was quite typical for the culture of the time. However, in this case, the host faces a dilemma: he has no food to offer his guest. So, in the middle of the night, he goes to a neighbor's house, hoping to borrow what he needs to care for his visitor.

Now, let's look at verse 7: "And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.'" Imagine the frustration of the person outside the door. You're tired, it's late, and all you need is a little help. But the person inside the house refuses, offering every excuse— "The door's locked. We're all in bed. It's too much trouble."

At this point, you might be thinking, “What kind of person doesn’t help in a time of need?” Verse 8 says, “I tell you, though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity, he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.”

Some might be tempted to read this parable and conclude that Jesus is simply teaching us to annoy God with our prayers—just keep knocking on the door, keep asking, and eventually, God will give us what we want. But that’s not the point. This parable is not about “bothering” God until He answers. Instead, it’s about understanding the character of the One to whom we are praying.

Jesus goes on to explain, “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened” (Luke 11:9-10). Here, we see a progression: “Ask, seek, knock.” This progression is not about begging, but about recognizing our dependence on God’s provision and His love. God already knows what we need—long before we ask. Jesus even goes so far as to say, “Your Father knows exactly what you need before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:8). So, what does that mean for us? It means that prayer isn’t about forcing God to do something—it’s about aligning ourselves with His will and trusting that He knows what is best for us, even when the answer is delayed.

This parable is often read as if God is some distant figure who needs to be persuaded to act, but that misses the mark. As Adam Clarke's Commentary suggests, these verses point to the fact that we are not the ones on the outside knocking on the door we are the children already inside the house, safe with our Father.³⁶

When Jesus uses the analogy of a father giving good gifts to his children, He's showing us that persistence in prayer doesn't mean we have to badger God until we wear Him down. Instead, it's about trusting in His goodness, His timing, and His perfect provision. In Luke 11:11-13, Jesus says, "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" The key to the entire parable is in verse 13: God will give us what we need, in His perfect time, and according to His perfect will. This is not about persuading God through persistence; it's about knowing that God's heart is inclined toward us. His answers may not always be immediate, but they will always be good because He is a good Father.

We don't have to worry that God is going to give us something harmful. He knows what is best for us. The gift He gives us, above all else, is His presence— "How much more will your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

³⁶Adam Clarke's Commentary. www.studyight.org/commentaries/eng/acc/luke-11.html

This is the ultimate gift, the Holy Spirit, the One that empowers us, strengthens us, and sustains us in our journey of faith.

In prayer, just as in life, the Fruit of the Spirit—especially patience—calls us to trust in God’s timing. He knows when, where, and how to answer. Our role is to bring our request to God not in a spirit of impatience or frustration, but with the peaceful assurance that our Father is good and always ready to give us exactly what we need.

8. Patience in Waiting for God’s Plan to Unfold

- Jesus’ Temptation in the Wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11): Jesus endured 40 days of temptation by Satan in the wilderness without yielding to the temptation to take shortcuts to glory or avoid suffering. His patience in waiting for God’s timing, rather than seizing power or fame prematurely, was an example of trust in the Father’s plan.

- The Resurrection and Promise of Return: Jesus patiently taught His disciples that He would be leaving them for a time but promised to return (John 14:1-3). His patience with their lack of understanding and His willingness to leave them for a time showed His trust in the Father’s plan and His confidence that the Holy Spirit would guide them in the meantime.

Christ’s patience is displayed in His humility, His grace towards sinners, His trust in God’s perfect timing, and His endurance through suffering. Through these examples, He calls us to be patient in our relationships, our prayers, our waiting, and our trials. As we follow Him, He will produce the fruit of patience in us, enabling us to trust that God’s timing is always perfect and His purposes are always good.

How Patience Fosters Personal and Spiritual Growth

Patience, particularly as described by the Biblical term “makrothymía”, is not just about waiting for things to get better or enduring difficult circumstances. It is a deep, purposeful endurance that fosters growth—both personal and spiritual. In a world that values instant gratification and quick fixes, cultivating patience is often counterintuitive. However, the Bible teaches that patience is essential for anyone seeking to mature spiritually and live a life marked by the Fruit of the Spirit.

Patience doesn't simply help us survive difficult situations—it helps us thrive and grow in the midst of them. Personal growth through patience requires a mindset that sees challenges as opportunities for development rather than obstacles to avoid. It is through waiting, persevering, and trusting God that our character is refined and strengthened.

1. Patience Teaches Self-Control

One of the most immediate fruits of patience is self-control. The “makrothymía” patience described in Galatians 5:22-23 is not passive resignation to life's difficulties, but an active choice to hold one's emotions and actions in check during trying times. This kind of patience doesn't react impulsively or lash out in frustration when things aren't going according to plan. Instead, it chooses to respond thoughtfully and calmly. Through consistent practice, patience strengthens our ability to make measured decisions instead of rash ones. It builds self-discipline that can carry us through moments of uncertainty and hardship without losing our temper or composure. Again, this is what time spent with Jesus will produce in us.

2. Patience Builds Resilience

Every time we patiently endure a challenge or delay, through the strength Jesus provides us we are strengthening our resilience. Patience teaches us to endure and persevere, in a way that makes us more determined, and more prepared to face the next difficulty with hope. Personal growth comes when we realize that trials are not the end of the story—they are the means by which God refines us. In James 1:3-4, we read, “Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” Each time we choose patience, we not only overcome adversity but also grow stronger in our ability to face future challenges.

3. Patience Helps Us Develop Perspective

Patience is closely tied to perspective. When we’re impatient, our vision narrows—we focus solely on the discomfort or the delay in front of us. But patience allows us to step back and view the bigger picture. It teaches us to see that our current circumstances are often temporary, and that lasting change takes time. The “makrothymía” we develop through waiting teaches us to trust the process, to trust that God is working even when we cannot see immediate results. This deeper understanding of time and process broadens our perspective, helping us appreciate the long-term rewards of patience, such as wisdom, character, and emotional maturity.

Patience is not just beneficial for our personal development—it is essential for our spiritual growth.

As we wait on the Lord and trust in His timing, we align ourselves with His will and deepen our relationship with Him. Patience cultivates a heart that is receptive to God's guidance, a spirit that is willing to be shaped and molded according to His purposes.

4. Patience Develops Trust in God's Timing

One of the most profound lessons we learn through patience is how to trust God's timing rather than our own. We live in a culture of immediacy where we expect quick answers to our prayers, fast solutions to problems, and rapid progress in our lives. But God's timing is often different from ours. Psalm 27:14 encourages us to "wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." Patience teaches us that God is never late and that His timing is perfect. As we grow in patience, we begin to trust that He is working all things for our good, even when the answers to our prayers are delayed. Spiritual maturity comes when we learn to rest in His sovereignty, trusting that He knows exactly what we need and when we need it.

5. Patience Deepens Our Relationship with God

Waiting on the Lord fosters intimacy with Him. It is in the waiting that we learn to lean into God's presence, to hear His voice more clearly, and to experience His faithfulness. The longer we wait, the more we learn to rely on God's strength rather than our own. In Isaiah 40:31, the prophet writes, "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

Patience transforms us into people who can endure hardship not in our power, but in the strength that God provides. The deeper our patience, the more we experience the intimate connection that comes from trusting in God's provision.

6. Patience Bears Fruit in Our Spiritual Lives

Patience is not just an isolated trait—it is part of the broader Fruit of the Spirit. When we cultivate patience, we are also growing in other virtues such as kindness, gentleness, and self-control, all of which contribute to our spiritual development.

In Romans 5:3-4, Paul writes, "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." Patience nurtures the fruit of hope in our hearts. It teaches us to hold onto God's promises even amid difficulty, knowing that He will ultimately fulfill His Word. This hope fuels our spiritual growth and deepens our relationship with God.

7. Patience Is a Testimony of God's Glory

As we learn patience, we become living testimonies of God's grace. When we wait with purpose, trusting in His plan, others around us see a witness to God's power and faithfulness. Patience becomes a means by which God displays His glory in our lives. When we press through trials without complaining or growing bitter, we demonstrate to the world that there is something different about the way we endure hardship. Our patience can point others to the One who has been patient with us, showing them the beauty of waiting on God.

The Ultimate Example of Patience: Jesus Christ

The supreme model of patience is found in Jesus Christ. His life on Earth was marked by incredible patience, from enduring the mocking and rejection of His own people to enduring the excruciating pain of the cross.

Hebrews 12:1-2 exhorts us to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Jesus’ patience in the face of suffering was purposeful. He endured for the joy of fulfilling His Father’s will and securing our salvation. As we follow Him, we learn that our patience also has a purpose— waiting with the hope and trust that God’s will is being accomplished through us.

Whether it’s enduring personal struggles or waiting for spiritual breakthroughs, patience fosters growth by developing our character, deepening our trust in God, and producing spiritual fruit. Through patience, we learn to endure hardship, grow in grace, and ultimately reflect God’s glory to the world.

As we grow in patience, we not only mature as individuals but also become more like Christ in the process. The patient believer serves as a testimony to the lasting joy and peace that come from trusting in God’s perfect timing, rather than seeking to satisfy the lusts of the flesh through instant gratification.

Stories of Patience in the Scriptures and Their Outcomes

Having explored how patience fosters personal and spiritual growth, we now turn to some powerful Biblical examples of individuals who lived out patience through their trials and circumstances.

These stories are not just tales of endurance but are rich lessons in trusting God's timing and purposes. The Bible offers us many examples of men and women whose patience led to profound outcomes—both in their own lives and in God's unfolding plan. Their stories demonstrate that while waiting may be difficult, God's purposes for us are always worth the wait.

As we reflect on the stories of Abraham, Joseph, Job, Hannah, Simeon, and Paul, we see how their patient endurance led to divine blessing, spiritual growth, and greater intimacy with God.

Abraham: The Father of Faith (Genesis 12–21)

Abraham's story is one of the most well-known examples of patience in Scripture. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations (Genesis 17:4-5), but it wasn't until Abraham was 100 years old that the promised child, Isaac, was born. For many years, Abram and Sarai waited in faith, despite their barrenness and the seeming impossibility of God's promise coming to pass.

During this waiting period, Abraham faced many trials, including leaving his homeland in obedience to God's call, dealing with the difficulty of a barren wife, and, in his impatience, considering his own solutions to God's promise—such as fathering a child with Hagar, which resulted in the birth of Ishmael.

But through it all, the faithful and the faithless moments, Abraham learned that patience was not just about waiting; it was about trusting in God's timing and resting in His faithfulness. In the end, God fulfilled His promise and through Isaac, the lineage of Israel would eventually bring forth the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Abraham's story teaches us that God's promises often require patient waiting, but God's faithfulness will never fail.

Joseph: From the Pit to the Palace (Genesis 37–50)

Joseph's story is another powerful example of patience in the face of suffering. Sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, Joseph endured years of hardship, including wrongful imprisonment, before rising to prominence in Egypt as second-in-command to Pharaoh.

At several key moments, Joseph could have taken matters into his own hands—seeking revenge on his brothers or trying to escape from prison—but instead, he chose to trust God's plan and timing. In Genesis 41:14-16, when Joseph is called to interpret Pharaoh's dream, he humbly acknowledges that it is God who provides the interpretation, showing that his faith remained fixed on the Lord, even during his years of suffering.

The patience Joseph displayed not only led to his promotion but also set the stage for the eventual salvation of his family and the preservation of Israel during a time of famine. Joseph's life teaches us that God often uses patience during difficult seasons to refine us, teach us dependence on Him, and set the stage for a greater purpose than we can imagine.

Job: The Patience of Suffering (Book of Job)

The book of Job offers one of the most profound meditations on patience in Scripture. Job was tested by severe suffering—losing his wealth, his health, and his family.

Job's story reveals that patience doesn't always mean we understand why we are suffering. Job asked God many questions, seeking an explanation for his suffering. In the end, God responded to Job's questions with a revelation of His sovereign power and wisdom, showing Job that God's ways are higher than human understanding.

Elihu leads Job to restoration by correcting his misconceptions about suffering, urging humility, emphasizing God's sovereignty and wisdom, and preparing Job's heart to receive God's direct response. God blessed Job with even greater prosperity than he had before, giving him a new family and a long life. Job's story teaches us that patience in suffering leads not just to the potential for personal restoration, but to a deeper understanding of God's nature and sovereignty.

Hannah: The Praying Mother (1 Samuel 1:9-20)

One of the most touching stories of patience in Scripture comes from Hannah, the mother of Samuel. Hannah longed for a child but was barren, and year after year, she faced the ridicule and disappointment of her infertility. Despite her anguish, she continued to pour out her heart to God in prayer, making a vow that if He gave her a son, she would dedicate him to the Lord for his entire life (1 Samuel 1:11).

For many years, Hannah's prayer seemed to be unanswered, but she did not give up. Instead of being consumed by bitterness, she remained patient. God answered her prayer, and she gave birth to Samuel, whom she faithfully dedicated to the Lord's service. Hannah's patience in waiting for God's answer brought forth not only a child but a prophet who would have a significant role in Israel's history.

Hannah's story teaches us the value of patience amid longing and sorrow. Her waiting was filled with prayer and trust. In the end, her patience resulted in the birth of a son who would become a mighty leader, and her faith grew stronger through her years of waiting.

Simeon: The Patient Expectant (Luke 2:25-32)

In the New Testament, Simeon is an exemplary figure of patience and faith. An old man who had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Messiah (Luke 2:26), Simeon waited patiently for years, holding onto the hope that he would see God's salvation with his own eyes.

When the infant Jesus was brought to the temple, Simeon's patience was rewarded. As he held the child, he declared, "Sovereign Lord, as You have promised, You may now dismiss Your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen Your salvation" (Luke 2:29-30). Simeon's story highlights that patience is not only about enduring hardship but also about living in hopeful expectation of God's promises. His patience led to a beautiful encounter with Jesus, fulfilling his lifelong longing and demonstrating the joy that comes when God's promises are fulfilled in His perfect time.

Paul: The Apostle's Patience in Ministry (2 Corinthians 6:3-10, Acts 9:15-16)

The Apostle Paul's life provides us with a powerful example of patience in ministry. After his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul faced years of suffering, persecution, and imprisonment. In 2 Corinthians 6:3-10, Paul lists the many hardships he endured and states: "We put up with anything rather than hinder the Gospel of Christ." He experienced beatings, shipwrecks, imprisonments, and constant opposition to his ministry. Yet through all of these trials, Paul maintained his faith and patience, understanding that his suffering was for a greater purpose: to spread the Gospel and to build up the Body of Christ.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul also wrote, "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3-4).

Paul's life of patience demonstrates that God's Kingdom often advances through patience during trials and that enduring hardship for the sake of the Gospel brings eternal rewards. Paul's story shows us that spiritual growth often involves waiting for God's timing to accomplish His purposes, even when the road is long and difficult.

The stories of Abraham, Joseph, Job, Hannah, Simeon, and Paul show us that patience in the Bible is more than just an abstract virtue; it is a vital part of God's transformative work in our lives.

Each of these individuals experienced hardship and waited for God’s promises to be fulfilled, and their patience resulted in deeper faith, greater spiritual maturity, and often, the fulfillment of God’s plans in ways they never could have imagined.

As we reflect on their examples, we are reminded that patience is not a passive state of resignation, but an active and hopeful trust in God’s timing and sovereignty. Whether we are enduring personal suffering, waiting for answers to prayer, or trusting God for a breakthrough, we can look to these stories as a reminder that waiting with purpose leads to a harvest of spiritual fruit—both in our lives and in the world around us.

Learning to Wait with Faith and Purpose

True Biblical patience involves actively trusting in God’s perfect timing, and understanding that there is a purpose behind every season of waiting. From Abraham to Hannah, we see how patience often leads to greater spiritual maturity, deeper intimacy with God, and the fulfillment of His promises in ways we could never fully anticipate.

Waiting with faith and purpose doesn’t come easily. So, how can we embrace the waiting seasons with both faith and purpose?

1. Trust in God’s Timing

The first step in learning to wait with faith is acknowledging that God’s timing is always better than our own.

We may want things to happen immediately or according to our plans, but God sees the bigger picture. He knows what we need when we need it, and how His plan will unfold for our ultimate good and His glory.

Isaiah 55:8-9 reminds us, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."

Just as Abraham had to wait for the birth of his promised son, or Hannah had to wait for the miracle of motherhood, we, too, must trust that God's timing is perfect—even when it doesn't make sense to us. Waiting allows us to relinquish control and place our trust in His wisdom, knowing that He is faithful to fulfill His promises in due season.

2. Embrace the Process of Spiritual Growth

Waiting is often where God does some of His deepest work in us. When we are given the opportunity to wait, we are given the chance to reflect, grow, and deepen our faith. The Scriptures are clear that the testing of our patience produces perseverance, and perseverance leads to maturity. James 1:3-4 says, "Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

While waiting, we are invited to develop the Fruit of the Spirit, especially patience and self-control. Every day we wait, we learn to lean on God's strength rather than our own. Waiting teaches us to be more like Jesus, who endured hardships without complaining or losing faith in the Father's will. This process of growth might be slow and uncomfortable at times, but it refines our character and prepares us for what God has ahead.

3. Stay Active in Faith During the Wait

Patience does not mean doing nothing; it means actively trusting God while we wait. When Simeon waited for the Messiah, he did not sit idle. He continued to serve God faithfully, praying and worshiping, living in hopeful expectation of God's promise. His waiting was full of purpose, as he continued to seek God and live out his faith.

In the same way, we are called to live with purpose while we wait. This includes continuing to pray, serving others, and trusting God in our daily actions, even when we don't yet see the results. Psalm 27:14 encourages us to "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." This verse reminds us that our waiting is a time of strengthening our hearts in faith.

4. Find Purpose in the Waiting

Waiting is never without meaning. Whether it's waiting for a breakthrough, healing, direction, or reconciliation, God uses the waiting season to work on our hearts, minds, and spirits.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8:28, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” Even when the waiting feels long or painful, we can trust that God is at work in ways we cannot always see.

When we shift our perspective and recognize that God is using the waiting season for our growth, we can wait with purpose. We can embrace each day with the knowledge that our current circumstances are preparing us for what’s ahead. Sometimes the waiting itself is part of God’s plan to refine us, strengthen us, or teach us something we need to know.

5. Hold onto Hope and Expectation

Finally, waiting with faith involves holding onto hope. Like Joseph, whose dreams were delayed but not forgotten, we are called to keep our eyes fixed on the future with hopeful expectations. Romans 8:25 reminds us, “But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”

Hope is not just wishful thinking; it’s an active confidence in God’s promises. We can look to the past faithfulness of God—like the faith stories of Abraham, Joseph, Job, and Hannah—and remind ourselves that God’s promises are always true, and He is always working for our good. Think about how God has been faithful to His Word in your life.

In the waiting, our hope in God should only grow stronger as we see His hand at work, even in the seemingly small or unnoticed moments.

This hope sustains us, keeps us grounded in faith, and reminds us that God is faithful to complete what He has started.

Renewed Strength: Trusting in God Through Life's Fatigue

Isaiah 40:31 says, "But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

At the time I was working on a sermon on Isaiah 40:31, I was dealing with a season of chronic fatigue—deep and ongoing tiredness that wouldn't lift, no matter how much sleep or caffeine I tried. I'm sure many of you can relate. We all face moments in life when our strength feels completely drained. And when that happens, it can feel like you're running on empty. Maybe it's not physical exhaustion you're facing, but mental, emotional, or spiritual fatigue. In those times, we look for anything that might offer some relief. Maybe a quick fix, something that will instantly restore our energy—like a vitamin B12 supplement. But these are temporary solutions. Sooner or later, the fatigue creeps back in, and we find ourselves just as drained as before.

But Isaiah offers a very different kind of hope. In this verse, there's a promise of "renewed" strength—a strength that doesn't just return to baseline but changes for the better. And this was a message that resonated with me deeply, especially in my weariness. "But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength." What does it mean to "renew" our strength?

The Hebrew word used here for strength is “ko’akh”, which refers to a power or might that’s produced.³⁷ In other words, strength that’s not just replenished, but revitalized—brought to a better place than it was before.

Imagine for a moment what it would be like if someone could bottle up renewed strength. If there was a pill you could take that would make you feel like you were soaring on wings like eagles, running without growing weary, walking without fainting—how many people would line up to take it? We all face seasons when our strength feels insufficient and when we wish we could tap into something greater to carry us through. And yet, the promise Isaiah gives us is that there is a way to receive that kind of renewal, it’s found in hope—in placing our hope in the Lord, rather than in anything else.

The Hebrew word for “hope” used here is “qâvâh”, meaning to expect or to wait with anticipation.³⁸ When we place our hope in the Lord, we are not merely wishing for things to get better—we are expecting that God is going to show up and act on our behalf. This kind of hope goes beyond positive thinking or self-help strategies. It’s not about relying on our strength or the strength of others; it’s about recognizing that true, lasting strength comes from God alone.

³⁷www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3581/kjv/wlc/0-1/

³⁸www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h6960/niv/wlc/0-1/

What does it mean to hope in the Lord when you're tired? It means recognizing that, no matter what's draining you—whether it's health struggles, relational stress, difficult work situations, or the challenges of everyday life—our ultimate source of strength is found in God. It's easy to place our hope in our abilities or in someone else's efforts to fix the problem. But when we do, we're bound to be disappointed, because human strength is finite. Our hope has to be placed in something more enduring.

Sometimes, we need to be worn down by life to realize that our strength isn't enough. And that's okay. Sometimes exhaustion is a gift because it's in those moments that we're finally brought to the place of surrender, where we acknowledge, "I can't do this on my own." This is where we begin to experience true hope—the kind that doesn't depend on us but on God's faithfulness. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10) because in our weakness, God's strength becomes most evident.

Here's the beauty of Isaiah 40:31: The Hebrew word for "renew" also means "to change for the better."³⁹ It's not just a restoration to what was, but an upgrade. Those who hope in the Lord don't just receive back the strength they lost, but they are given a new kind of strength—one that is deeper, more resilient, and more enduring than what they had before. This is why patience is such an amazing fruit because it leads us to the place of having a renewed strength, a better strength than we had before we had to wait.

³⁹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2498/niv/wlc/0-1/

The trials of life allow us to lean on God more fully and to experience His faithfulness in ways that strengthen us for the next challenge. Our strength is renewed not in the absence of difficulty, but in the presence of God in the midst of it. His past faithfulness becomes the foundation for our trust in the present and the future.

So, when you're tired, when you're running low on strength, don't look to quick fixes that will leave you more drained than before. Instead, place your hope in the Lord. Wait for Him. Expect Him to show up and renew you in ways that will leave you better, stronger, and more resilient than you were before. This is the promise of Isaiah 40:31, and it's a promise that's available to each of us—if we are willing to trust in the God who renews our strength.

Patience Takes Us on a Journey

Learning to wait with faith and purpose is a journey. It's a practice of trusting God's timing, embracing the spiritual growth that comes from waiting, and finding joy in His purpose for our lives—no matter how long or difficult the wait may be. The stories of the Bible show us that waiting with purpose produces not just results, but transformation. We grow in faith, we align more closely with God's will, and we become more like Christ in the process.

As we face our seasons of waiting, let's hold on to the truth that God is always at work, even when we can't see it. Our faith in Him will not be disappointed, and in His perfect timing, the promises He has made will come to pass. Until then, let us wait with faith, purpose, and joyful expectation.

Chapter 5

Patience (makrothymía) - Waiting with Purpose Small Group Questions

1. How does Jesus' example of patience—especially in His interactions with those who misunderstood, rejected, or mistreated Him—challenge the way you respond to delays, frustrations, or injustices in your own life? Consider moments when you've faced misunderstanding or provocation. How can embracing a more patient, purposeful response, as modeled by Jesus, transform your relationships and deepen your trust in God's timing?

2. In the story of the blind man (John 9), Jesus shifts the focus from "why" the man is suffering to "what" God can do through it. How does this challenge the way you approach your suffering or challenges?

3. When faced with difficulties, do you find yourself asking “Why is this happening to me?” or are you more open to asking “What is God teaching me through this?” What are some things we could do to help shift our mindset?

4. In your life, have you experienced a moment where waiting or enduring hardship led to personal or spiritual growth? How did that period of patience transform your understanding of God’s purpose for you? Reflect on how God may have used a difficult time in your life to develop character, resilience, or a deeper trust in Him.

5. Joseph’s patience led him to trust God’s sovereignty even when life seemed unjust—his brothers sold him, he was wrongfully imprisoned, and yet he remained faithful to God. Have you ever faced a situation where your circumstances seemed unfair or beyond your control? How did your understanding of God’s sovereignty help you endure that season of suffering? Consider how trusting in God’s ultimate control can bring peace and perspective during challenging circumstances.

6. In the Bible, waiting is often depicted as a refining process where God shapes us and prepares us for His greater purpose. How can you embrace your current waiting season as a gift, rather than a burden? What areas of your life might God be refining during this time, and how can you partner with Him in that process? Consider how your waiting might be transforming you—both in character and faith—as you trust in God’s perfect plan.

Chapter 6
Kindness (chrēstótēs) - The Power of Gentle Acts



1 Corinthians 13:4a states: "Love is patient, love is kind." We discover that kindness is a form of love. Each Fruit of the Spirit is an expression of God's love, made possible by His grace received by faith through the work of His Son. This may be why Paul when speaking of faith, hope, and love says, "But the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13b). Love is the foundation that encompasses and gives life to all the other Fruit of the Spirit.

The Profound Kindness of God: A Reflection on Divine Grace and Our Call to Be Kind

In Romans 11:22, Paul writes, "Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off."

God's kindness refers to His unmerited favor or grace, which is freely given to us through Jesus Christ. For centuries, the nation of Israel had a special relationship with God, enjoying the privilege of His favor. However, despite this unique position, they ultimately did not receive it. God extended His love to the Jews, but they turned away from Him. Yet, God did not reject Israel or cast them aside completely (Romans 11:1). Instead, it was Israel who, through their unbelief, cut themselves off from His favor (Romans 11:20).

In this context, Paul is not threatening individual believers, but rather speaking about the Gentiles as a group. The message is clear: if the Gentiles, who were once outside of God's favor, follow the same path of unbelief that Israel took, they too risk being cut off from His blessings.

This is not a matter of personal salvation for believers, who are secure in Christ, but a warning about the corporate rejection of God's grace.

The principle is simple: If the Gentiles as a group repeat the mistakes of the unbelieving Jews (refusal of God's grace through Jesus), they too will find themselves cut off from God's favor. When people refuse His blessings, they will not experience them. When they refuse to come to Jesus for life, they remain spiritually dead. The condemnation of unbelief is not imposed by God—it is the result of rejecting His offer of grace.⁴⁰

The kindness of God is not a superficial or fleeting thing. It is a kindness that is profound, transformative, and rooted in His nature. It is not a kindness that simply overlooks sin or ignores wrongdoings. No, it is a kindness that holds in balance both justice and mercy. God's kindness is extended to those who have received His grace, yet it is also a kindness that invites us to remain in it and to experience the depths of His love. It is in this kindness that we find our hope, our salvation, and our place in His family.

God's kindness is not a passing gesture—it is an invitation to transformation. The kindness that God shows is not just for a moment, but it is eternal. It is for us and extended through us. As we reflect on this divine kindness, we are called to express it through Christ.

⁴⁰Paul Ellis. The Grace Commentary. www.thegracecommentary.com/romans-11/#romans11v22

The ultimate display of kindness is the grace shown to us through Jesus. In Ephesians 2:7, Paul continues this thought: “In order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

God’s kindness is not just a concept; it is the very essence of how He treats us through His Son. God’s kindness is demonstrated in grace so abundant that it cannot be measured. Paul speaks of the “incomparable riches” of God’s grace, which means that God’s kindness to us is lavish, extravagant, and limitless. When we look at Christ’s life, death, and Resurrection, we see the kindness of God in its purest form. This kindness is not given because of our merit or worth but because of His unchanging love for us. It is through Christ that we come to understand the depths of divine kindness—a kindness that saves, redeems, and makes all things new.

Kindness is a Revelation of God’s Heart

In Titus 3:4, Paul again speaks of God’s kindness in a powerful way: “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.”

Here, Paul reminds us that God’s kindness isn’t something we can earn. It is entirely rooted in His mercy and love. God, in His kindness, comes to us not because of our works or our righteousness, but out of the abundance of His mercy. His kindness is deeply relational—it reaches us where we are, in our need, and it lifts us. The kindness of God is an unmerited gift that is offered to us freely and fully.

Kindness is a Mark of God's People

In Colossians 3:12, Paul exhorts the church, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

As recipients of God's immense kindness, we are called to embody that same kindness in our relationships with others. Paul uses the imagery of "clothing ourselves" with these virtues, suggesting that kindness is something we put on—intentionally, every day. Just as God's kindness is a garment that covers us, we are to wear kindness as part of our identity as His people. It is not just an occasional act, but a lifestyle that reflects the heart of God to the world around us. To be kind is to mirror the heart of Christ, whose life was characterized by tenderness, compassion, and an unrelenting love for others.

Kindness is demonstrated through how we live. In 2 Corinthians 6:6, Paul describes the characteristics of a faithful servant of God: "in purity, understanding, patience, and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love."

Here, Paul places kindness alongside other important traits—purity, understanding, patience, and love. The context is about living a life that reflects Christ, even in hardship.

It's not just when things are easy that we demonstrate kindness, but it's in the every day, in the moments of difficulty, when our kindness is tested.

Kindness is a Fruit of the Holy Spirit, and it is a clear marker of the transformed life, it is a gift of the Spirit. This divine kindness doesn't just change our behavior—it transforms our hearts, making us more like Christ, more patient, more understanding, and more compassionate.

The Call to Reflect God's Kindness

To be kind is to participate in the ongoing revelation of God's grace to the world. His kindness is so much more than an action or a choice we make; it is the outpouring of His love and mercy through us. We have been the recipients of this profound kindness through Jesus Christ, and now we are called to live in this kindness.

The kindness of God is life-giving. It brings healing, restoration, and new life. It extends forgiveness, brings peace, and offers grace where none is deserved. This is the kindness we are called to show. It is not a kindness that is selective or temporary; it is a kindness that flows from the very heart of God and is meant to flow through us into a hurting world. Kindness is what leads the world to repentance to change their mind about God and their need for His grace.

As we reflect on God's kindness, we are reminded that kindness is not merely a behavior to adopt, but a spirit that is deeply rooted in the grace of God, shaped by His love, and empowered by His Spirit. The more we encounter the kindness of God, the more we are transformed by it, and the more we can extend that same kindness to others.

In the Bible, the term “lovingkindness” is often used to describe God’s character, particularly in the Old Testament, and it carries a deep, relational, and covenantal meaning. It’s important to understand why it’s translated this way and how it connects to the concept of kindness, especially when we examine the original Hebrew and Greek words.

The term “lovingkindness” comes from the Hebrew word “chesed” (חֶסֶד), which is one of the most significant words in the Old Testament for describing God’s covenantal love. “Chesed” is often translated as “steadfast love, mercy, grace, or lovingkindness, and it refers to a deeply relational, committed love that is unbreakable and unconditional.⁴¹ It’s a love that binds God to His people, characterized not just by feeling or emotion but by action, particularly toward those who are in need or who are undeserving.

In passages like Psalm 136:1, we read: “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love “chesed” endures forever.” Here, “chesed” signifies God’s loyal, covenantal love that endures regardless of the circumstances, a love that is constant and faithful. This kind of love is not a temporary affection but a durable, steadfast commitment to His promises. It often accompanies acts of kindness, mercy, and deliverance.

The Greek Concept of Kindness

When the Bible transitions from Hebrew to Greek in the New Testament, the word “kindness” in Greek is typically “chrēstotēs” (χρηστότης).

⁴¹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2617/niv/wlc/0-1/

The Greek word “chrēstotēs” refers to goodness, gentleness, and benevolence. It denotes a disposition of being gentle, considerate, and generous in our actions toward others.⁴² It’s often translated as “kindness” or “goodness”, particularly in the New Testament, to describe both the character of God and the expected fruit that will be produced in believers.

For example, in Ephesians 2:7, Paul writes about God’s kindness in relation to salvation: “In order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” Here, “chrēstotēs” highlights God’s disposition of goodness and generosity toward us, a kindness that is revealed most profoundly in the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Is There a Difference Between “Chesed” and “Chrēstotēs”?

While both “chesed” and “chrēstotēs” refer to kindness, mercy, and love, there are some important differences, particularly when viewed through the lens of the Old and New Testament contexts:

1. Covenantal vs. General Kindness:

- “Chesed” in the Old Testament often emphasizes the covenantal and unfailing love of God. It’s tied to God’s promises to His people, especially in the context of Israel’s relationship with Him. This love is enduring, committed, and often expressed through acts of mercy and deliverance. It’s God’s relational faithfulness.

⁴²www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5543/niv/mgnt/0-1/

- “Chrēstotēs”, on the other hand, refers more generally to kindness or goodness. It’s a broader concept that encompasses moral excellence, generosity, and an overall kind disposition toward others. While it is also a Fruit of the Spirit and an attribute of God, it may not carry the same covenantal weight that “chesed” does.

2. Action and Attitude:

- “Chesed” emphasizes God’s active engagement in His relationship with His people. It is a love that moves God to act—whether in mercy, deliverance, or compassion. It is love in action, often linked with acts of saving and protecting.

- “Chrēstotēs” emphasizes the attitude of kindness. It is the character of being good, gentle, and generous in our dealings with others, both in thought and in deed. It is less about covenant faithfulness and more about the disposition of the heart toward others. An overflow of the kindness received in Christ.

3. Old Testament vs. New Testament:

- In the Old Testament, the concept of “chesed” is central to understanding God’s relationship with His people, particularly in His promises and His actions toward Israel.

- In the New Testament, “chrēstotēs” is closely associated with the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is one of the Fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and an essential characteristic for Christians to embody, reflecting the kindness of God shown through Christ.

The Connection Between Kindness and Repentance: The Power of a Changed Mind

As we've seen earlier, kindness—whether in the form of “chesed” or “chrēstotēs”—is linked to repentance. In Romans 2:4, Paul explains that it is God's kindness that leads us to repentance: “Or do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, forbearance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?” The kindness of God, especially as expressed in the New Covenant through Christ, has the power to change our minds “metanoia”—to bring us into a new way of thinking about our relationship with God. The root of this word (metanoia) is “meta”, which means “change”, and “noia” comes from “nous”, meaning “mind” or “thought”, thus “metanoia” means “to change one's mind”,⁴³ Repentance, then, is not merely an emotional response or a feeling of regret; it is a revolution of the mind—a profound shift in how we view God, ourselves, and our actions.

Repentance often carries a heavy, almost somber connotation, but when we understand it through the lens of God's kindness, it becomes something beautiful. God's kindness isn't meant to make us feel condemned for our failures or wrongdoings; rather, it is meant to change our thinking—to help us see things from a new perspective. When we encounter the kindness of God, we are faced with the reality of His love, mercy, and grace. This understanding has the power to break down our self-reliance and our pride, replacing it with a deep recognition of our need for Him.

⁴³www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3341/niv/mgnt/0-1/

Think about it: kindness is disarming. When someone treats us with kindness, especially when we don't deserve it, it challenges us to reconsider our position. God's kindness does the same—it confronts our hearts, urging us to think differently about the way we live and the way we relate to Him. When we experience God's kindness, we begin to realize how far we've fallen short, but in a way that is inviting, not condemning. It draws us to change our minds—not in a place of shame, but in awe of His grace.

The idea that God's kindness leads us to repentance suggests that true repentance isn't motivated by fear of punishment but by the overwhelming love and goodness of God. When we see how kind He has been to us—how He has not treated us as our sins deserve—it should shift the way we think. Our minds, hearts, and wills are changed as we come to understand that God's desire is not to punish us, but to restore us. His kindness, rather than driving us away in guilt, invites us into the freedom of transformation.

In this way, repentance is more than just an acknowledgment of wrongs; it is a renewal of the mind that leads to a change in our behavior. This shift in thinking aligns us with God's will and helps us begin to reflect the very Fruit of the Spirit, including kindness, in our own lives.

This change in perspective does not just affect our actions, but our entire way of thinking. We start to see God's love as the driving force behind everything.

It means we stop focusing on our failures and start focusing on His goodness. We stop trying to earn His favor and realize that His kindness has already been extended to us. This change in thought—this shift to God’s perspective—opens up the space for true freedom, joy, and peace.

It’s important to understand that repentance does not move God to forgive us—His forgiveness has already been made available to us through Christ. This is seen in Ephesians 4:32. “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave (past tense) you.” What’s more, is that the Greek word “forgave” (charízomai) as in “God forgave you” is granted in kindness.⁴⁴

Repentance, then, is a response to God’s forgiveness, a positive and transformative response to the love and kindness He has already shown us. When we can receive and truly understand the goodness of God, it changes us. Repentance is a way of rethinking our approach to God, to others, and to life itself, in light of His overwhelming goodness.

When we encounter God’s kindness—His active, generous love (whether as “chesed” or “chrēstotēs”)—it opens our hearts to the possibility of change. Kindness makes us feel valued, not condemned. It draws us out of defensiveness and pride, showing us the goodness and mercy of God that we could never earn, but which is freely offered to us. This encounter with God’s goodness softens our hearts, making repentance—a change of mind and heart—possible.

⁴⁴www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5483/kjv/tr/0-1/

The Role of Kindness in Our Lives

As believers, reflecting God’s kindness through “chrēstotēs” (the Fruit of the Spirit) is not just about being “nice” to others. It is about embodying the goodness and mercy that we have received from God. Just as God’s kindness leads us to repentance, our kindness toward others can reflect His love in a way that points them toward Him and leads them to reflect on His goodness. Kindness, therefore, becomes a tool for transformation—both in our lives and in the lives of those around us.

While both “chesed” (lovingkindness) and “chrēstotēs” (kindness) express God’s goodness and mercy, they emerge from different theological backgrounds. Both are expressions of God’s love, but in different contexts, they challenge us to understand the depth of God’s kindness—both as a part of His relationship with us and as a powerful force that leads us to repentance and transformation.

A Changed Mind Reflects the Fruit of Kindness

When our minds are transformed by God’s kindness, we begin to think differently about how we treat others. Repentance, in its deepest sense, involves a transformation in how we approach life, and that includes our relationships. As we change our minds—from self-centeredness to God-centeredness, from pride to humility—we begin to reflect the very kindness that God has shown us.

This is why kindness is a Fruit of the Spirit. As our minds are renewed by the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to be kind—not just in our actions, but in our thoughts and attitudes. The same grace that God extended to us begins to flow out of us to others, especially when they least expect it.

Kindness becomes the natural outpouring of a life that has been transformed by God's love and mercy.

The process of repentance is a change in our thoughts, attitudes, and behavior. As our minds align more with God's perspective, we begin to reflect His character more clearly. And at the heart of God's character is kindness.

As you reflect on the kindness God has shown you, ask yourself: How has His kindness led to a change of mind in your own life? How is that change reflected in your relationships with others? As we allow God's kindness to renew our minds, we can begin to live out the fruit of kindness in powerful, life-changing ways.

Chapter 6

Kindness (chrēstótēs) - The Power of Gentle Acts Small Group Questions

1. In Romans 11:22, Paul describes God's kindness as something that leads to repentance. What does it mean for you to "continue in His kindness"? How does experiencing God's kindness in your own life change the way you view your relationships with others?

2. Ephesians 2:7 speaks of God's kindness as "incomparable" and rooted in His grace. How does God's kindness in Christ challenge your understanding of kindness in your daily life? How can you reflect the depth of God's kindness in your interactions with others, particularly those who may not deserve it?

3. In 2 Corinthians 6:6, Paul lists kindness as one of the virtues of a faithful servant of God, especially in difficult circumstances. How can we demonstrate kindness when we are facing personal challenges or adversity? What role does the Holy Spirit play in helping us show kindness even when it feels hard or inconvenient?

4. In Romans 2:4, Paul writes that God’s kindness leads us to repentance—not out of fear, but through His goodness. How has experiencing God’s kindness in your life led to a change of mind (repentance)? How can you begin to view repentance not just as acknowledging wrongs, but as a shift in thinking that aligns you with God’s love and grace?

5. The passage emphasizes that as our minds are transformed by God's kindness, we begin to reflect that same kindness to others. What are some practical ways you can intentionally embody the kindness of God in your relationships this week?

6. What is one additional takeaway you had from this chapter on the fruit of kindness?

Chapter 7
Goodness (agathōsýnē) - Living Generously



“Agathōsýnē” goodness only appears in four New Testament verses (Romans 15:14, Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 5:9, and 2 Thessalonians 1:1). Exploring the usage of this word in other verses helps us gain a fuller understanding of this Fruit of the Spirit.

Agathōsýnē is defined in Greek as uprightness of heart and life, goodness.⁴⁵ It is the goodness of God that leads us to trust Him. This means that as this fruit grows in us so too grows our trust relationship with our heavenly Father.

1. Romans 15:14

“I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.”

In Romans 15:14, agathōsýnē is used to describe a character trait of the Roman believers. Paul commends them for being “full of goodness”, indicating that they are filled with moral excellence that is grounded in God’s nature. This goodness here is linked to knowledge and the ability to instruct others, implying that true goodness engages with others in love and service.

It’s important to note that “agathōsýnē” in Romans refers to a goodness that is practical and relational. The Roman believers’ goodness the Holy Spirit has produced in them is so rich that it enables them to teach and guide others. Goodness, then, is a characteristic of people who are not only upright in their own lives but are also equipped to help others grow in faith and wisdom.

2. Galatians 5:22

⁴⁵www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g19/niv/mgnt/0-1/

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

Here, goodness is listed as one of the virtues that are the result of the Holy Spirit’s work in the believer’s life. The connection of goodness with the other fruits suggests that it is not a standalone trait but is interconnected with virtues like love, kindness, and faithfulness. “Agathōsýnē” in this context implies a moral and ethical goodness that is both a reflection of God’s goodness and a manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life. It is not just about being morally upright but also about embodying a spirit of generosity, kindness, and goodness toward others.

In 2 Corinthians 9:8-9, Paul connects God’s goodness with generosity: “And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work... As it is written: ‘They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.’” Here, the goodness of God prompts a generous lifestyle in believers.

Let’s explore more the concept of goodness embodying a spirit of generosity.

Goodness motivates people to help others in need, prompting generosity through acts such as:

- Financial generosity: Giving to those in need, supporting the poor, and contributing to causes that reflect God’s heart for justice and mercy.

An excellent example of financial generosity motivated by goodness is found in Paul’s letters, particularly his

appeal to the Corinthians regarding the collection for the saints in Jerusalem.

The believers in Jerusalem were in urgent need due to a combination of factors:

1. **Famine:** A severe famine had affected the region, as we see mentioned in Acts 11:27-30. This famine likely led to food shortages, making it difficult for many to survive.
2. **Persecution:** The early Christians in Jerusalem were also suffering from persecution. As they were ostracized and often excluded from regular employment opportunities because of their faith, their financial situation worsened. Many lost their livelihoods or were economically disadvantaged.
3. **Economic Hardship:** Jerusalem, being a major center of Jewish life and now the heart of the early Christian movement, was experiencing great poverty among the believers, partly because Christians were often excluded from social and economic networks due to their new faith in Jesus.

In 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, Paul writes to the church in Corinth, encouraging them to participate in a "collection for the saints" in Jerusalem. He gives instructions on how they should prepare for this offering:

"Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem" (1 Corinthians 16:1-3, ESV).

Paul also addresses this topic in 2 Corinthians 8-9, where he provides further encouragement, specifically praising the generosity of the Macedonian churches and urging the Corinthians to give generously, out of a heart of love and sincerity.

In 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, he describes the Macedonian churches' response to the need:

"We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints."

Here, the Macedonian churches—despite their poverty—demonstrated extraordinary generosity, and Paul encouraged the Corinthians to follow their example, as in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7:

"Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

The goodness of God's grace in their own lives motivated these Christians to be generous. As Paul describes it, they gave out of "joy", even in the face of their hardship, and were "cheerful" in their giving. The act of sharing with others in need was not seen as a burden but as a privilege and an expression of their love for God and fellow believers.

Their generosity reflected the heart of God for justice and mercy, as they gave sacrificially to support the poor and suffering members of the Body of Christ.

- Generosity of time: Volunteering and serving others, showing kindness and love through actions.

Tabitha was a woman in the early church who demonstrated a generosity of time through her service to others in her community, particularly to the widows and the poor.

“Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, ‘Please come to us without delay.’ So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all outside and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body, he said, ‘Tabitha, arise.’ And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord” (Acts 9:36-42, ESV).

Tabitha (Dorcas) was a disciple of Jesus who demonstrated extraordinary generosity of time by investing in others through her service and kindness. She was known for being “full of good works and acts of charity.” The people of Joppa remembered her not only for her generosity but for the tangible ways she

served them, especially the widows in the community, who were often the most vulnerable and marginalized in society.

Dorcas used her time to make garments (like tunics) for those in need. This was a practical way she showed love and generosity toward the poor and widows. When she passed away, the widows showed Peter the clothing she had made for them as a testimony of her generosity.

Tabbitha (Dorcas) had such a profound impact on the lives of those around her that her death deeply saddened the community. Her generosity of time and care had made a lasting impression, and the people were so moved that they sent for Peter to come and pray for her.

After Peter prayed and called Dorcas back to life, the community witnessed the miracle, and many people came to believe in the Lord as a result. Dorcas' servant-hearted life and her sacrificial time spent helping others were part of the testimony that led people to Christ.

- Generosity of spirit: Offering forgiveness, encouragement, and compassion, all of which require a generous heart.

A powerful example of generosity of spirit is seen in Paul's encouragement to Philemon regarding his runaway slave, Onesimus, who had become a Christian.

In the letter to Philemon, Paul asks him to forgive and accept Onesimus, who had wronged him by running away. Onesimus, however, had since become a believer, and Paul urges Philemon to show generosity of spirit by offering forgiveness and compassion.

“Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love’s sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me. I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the Gospel, but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord” (Philemon 1:8-16, ESV).

The generosity of spirit Paul exemplifies here is reflected in the way he offers encouragement to both Onesimus (by calling him useful and a beloved brother) and Philemon (by encouraging him to forgive and accept Onesimus with grace). This reflects the generous nature of the Gospel itself, where forgiveness and reconciliation are key themes.

Generosity and Goodness: The Overflow of God’s Blessing

“A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed” (Proverbs 11:25).

In a world that often promotes a “dog-eat-dog” mentality—where the focus is on self-preservation and climbing the ladder at all costs—God’s Word offers a powerful counter-narrative. Proverbs 11:25 tells us that generosity leads to prosperity. While the word

“prosper” might be associated with wealth, we are reminded that true prosperity is not just about material gain. The best things in life—“love, peace, health, joy, friendship, time” money can’t buy.

God’s heart for blessing is clear in Genesis 12:2, where He tells Abraham, “I will bless you and make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” Just as God blessed Abraham to be a blessing, He blesses us so we can be a blessing to others. Generosity is an expression of this—freely giving what we have freely received from God.

When we give, we become like a channel of His blessings, passing on the abundance we’ve received. The more we are generous the more we align ourselves with God’s nature, which is to bless others. Jesus modeled this perfectly during His earthly ministry, giving not just of His resources, but of His time, love, and compassion. And through the power of His Spirit, we are empowered to do the same.

The River of Life and Generosity

Proverbs 11:24 says, “One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.” This principle is beautifully illustrated in nature. Think of a mighty river flowing through a dry land, constantly nourishing everything it touches. The river doesn’t hold back its waters but gives freely, sustaining life wherever it goes. Likewise, when we live generously, giving of our time, love, and resources, we become conduits of God’s grace, like rivers flowing from the throne of God.

Revelation 22:1-2 describes the “River of Life” flowing from the throne of God, bringing healing and life to all. We are called to mirror that river, sharing freely and replenishing others, because as we refresh others,

we, too, are refreshed (Proverbs 11:25). Our generosity doesn't just bless others—it replenishes our hearts and brings joy to our lives.

God's Abundant Provision

Jesus Himself demonstrated divine generosity when He fed the 5,000 plus with five loaves and two fish. In John 6:5-13, Jesus took a small offering and God multiplied it miraculously to feed thousands. Not only did He meet their immediate needs, but there were twelve baskets of leftovers, showing the abundance of God's provision. When we trust God's ability to provide, we move from a scarcity mindset to an abundance mindset, believing that He will supply all our needs and empower us to give freely.

This is what Proverbs 11:25 teaches us. When we give generously, we become part of God's superabundant economy. It's more than just giving; it's about recognizing the abundance we have in Christ and passing it on. The more we give, the more we create room for God to bless us with even greater abundance, including the blessings that come from being a generous giver.

Faith, Grace, and Generosity

The Bible says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), and that's true in our relationships with others. When we give generously, we are reflecting the heart of our generous Savior. But when it comes to God, our role is to receive His blessings with faith and gratitude. As believers, we are called to both give generously to others and receive generously from God.

It's crucial to understand the dynamic of giving and receiving. Faith is the hand that receives from God,

trusting in His grace to supply all our needs. As we embrace this truth, we experience the fullness of life and provision that Christ offers.

The Example of Alexander the Great

The story of Alexander the Great offers a powerful picture of generosity. When he gave a beggar several gold coins, one of his attendants asked why he didn't just give copper coins, which would have been enough. Alexander's response was profound: "Copper coins would suit the beggar's need, but gold coins suit Alexander's giving."⁴⁶

As children of God, we are royalty. Our generosity reflects not only our identity as heirs of the King but also our call to reflect the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Like Him, we are called to give abundantly, not out of obligation, but as a natural overflow of the goodness and grace we've received.

Generosity as an Expression of Victory

The cross of Jesus was the ultimate act of generosity. Through His death and Resurrection, He conquered sin and death. As overcomers in Christ, we are called to reflect His victory by embracing a life of generosity. Our generosity is a testimony to the abundant life we have in Christ. The fruit He bears in us enables us to be instruments of blessing, encouraging others as we reflect His love and grace.

Jesus' life on Earth was a constant demonstration of generosity. Whether it was feeding the hungry, healing the sick, or showing compassion to the marginalized, Jesus' ministry was marked by an overflowing abundance. He gave freely because He knew He had

⁴⁶A King's Riches. Seeds of Truth Ministry. www.joehollcraft.org/kings-riches

an inexhaustible supply from the Father. Though Jesus possessed little in terms of earthly wealth or material possessions, He was always abundantly supplied with everything He needed to fulfill the purposes and mission that God the Father entrusted to Him. His needs were met in perfect alignment with God's will, and He relied not on earthly resources but on divine provision to carry out His work.

Embracing Generosity

As we embrace generosity in our own lives, we become conduits of that same overflow. Proverbs 11:25 reminds us that, "A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed." This isn't just about material prosperity, but about spiritual refreshment, joy, and peace that come from living in alignment with God's generous heart and are the markers of the Kingdom (Romans 14:17).

Generosity is a powerful expression of the Fruit of the Spirit. As we embrace a generous life, we reflect the character of Christ—who generously gave of Himself for the sake of others. We are not only called to give but also to receive from God's infinite storehouse, trusting that He will continue to provide for our every need.

Goodness as the Reflection of God's Light in Jesus

"For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth" (Ephesians 5:9).

In Ephesians 5:9, goodness is connected with righteousness and truth. This suggests that true goodness is not simply a matter of being kind or generous, but is firmly rooted in what is right and true according to God's standards. Goodness, here, is a

moral and ethical quality that is reflective of God's light, and it stands in contrast to the darkness of sin.

The "fruit of the light" is a term that suggests that believers are to live in a way that reflects God's own nature. The Spirit works within us, transforming our hearts and minds, and enabling us to bear the fruit that reflects God's character. As God is good, so believers are to bear this goodness in their lives.

"To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of His calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

In this verse, "goodness" is expressed through the believers' "resolve for good" and "work of faith." The context is a prayer for the Thessalonians to live out their calling in such a way that they bring glory to God. The term "goodness" here is tied to a deliberate choice to pursue what is good, as well as the strength to accomplish that goodness through faith and the power of God.

The Apostle Paul is praying for the Thessalonians and his prayer shows that goodness involves both intention (a resolve to do good) and action (the work of faith). True goodness is not just a passive attribute, but an active pursuit of what is right and pleasing to God, undertaken in dependence on His strength.

Having examined the Biblical understanding of goodness—a moral quality that is rooted in the Holy Spirit's work within us and expressed in our relationships and actions toward others—we now turn to the essence of goodness.

The Goodness of Jesus

We find Jesus as the supreme example of goodness. As the perfect manifestation of God's nature, Jesus embodies every aspect of goodness and moral integrity that the Scriptures describe. If we want to understand what it means to live with the goodness that the Holy Spirit produces in us, we look to Jesus as our model. In Him, we see goodness lived out in its most perfect form—not just in His actions, but in the very essence of who He is.

Goodness springs from the inside out, rooted in a heart that is fully aligned with God's will. Jesus did not live by two standards, one for the crowds and another in private. He was perfectly consistent and utterly reliable, and His character was without blemish. His life and teachings were an integrated whole, and He demonstrated moral integrity at all times—whether He was teaching in public, serving His disciples, or facing the cross.

When we look at Jesus, we see the embodiment of *agathōsýnē*—a goodness that is more than just kindness; it is rooted in perfect righteousness, truth, and love. Jesus' life illustrates moral goodness in its highest form, and He sets the standard for what it means to live with integrity.

1. Jesus' Goodness Was Rooted in His Relationship with the Father

Jesus, the Son of God, always aligned His will with the Father's will. His moral integrity came from His complete devotion to God's purposes. His life was a constant act of obedience, which He modeled for us in His prayer, "Not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus was perfectly aligned with God's character, and His actions always reflected the heart of

the Father. His goodness was not a superficial act, but an outflow of His unbroken relationship with the Father.

2. Jesus' Goodness Was Demonstrated in His Selfless Love and Sacrifice

Goodness in Jesus was seen most clearly in His self-sacrificial love for humanity. The ultimate act of moral goodness is displayed on the cross, where Jesus, though completely sinless, took on the consequences of sin for the sake of the world. As Paul says in Romans 5:8, "God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus' goodness is not abstract or theoretical; it is deeply personal and practical. He showed the fullness of God's moral goodness in His willingness to lay down His life for the unworthy.

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die" (Romans 5:6-7).

3. Jesus Was a Model of Goodness in His Interaction with Others

Throughout His ministry, Jesus demonstrated moral integrity (goodness) in His interactions with people. He treated the marginalized with dignity (the lepers, tax collectors, sinners, and Gentiles), while also challenging the religious elite, exposing their hypocrisy. His actions were always in perfect alignment with the truth, and His goodness revealed the people's inability to meet God's perfect standards as outlined in the Law of Moses, highlighting their need for a Savior. His goodness was not passive or weak; it was strong, bold, and transformative.

4. Jesus Lived Out Goodness in the Face of Temptation

The ultimate test of moral integrity is how one responds to temptation. Jesus faced intense temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11), yet He remained sinless. His responses to Satan's temptations were grounded in the truth of God's Word, revealing that true goodness is not just about outward actions, but also about being rooted in God's truth and trusting in His provision. In every trial, Jesus chose to act in ways that were pleasing to His Father, providing us with the ultimate example of moral integrity.

5. Jesus' Goodness Is Our Source

Jesus is not just an example of goodness; He is the source of goodness for every believer. We are filled with the Holy Spirit, and as the Spirit produces goodness in us, we are being shaped to reflect the moral integrity that Jesus perfectly embodied. As we live out the fruit of goodness, we are growing in Christlikeness—striving to imitate His goodness, love, and grace.

As we are transformed by the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to reflect the goodness of Christ in all areas of our lives—through our thoughts, actions, and relationships. In every moment, we have the opportunity to reflect on His goodness and grow in moral integrity, as we are conformed to His image and live for His glory.

Jesus is described in Scripture as the "exact representation" or "image" of God the Father (Hebrews 1:3), meaning His life and actions reveal God's character in a direct, tangible way. The Bible is full of examples of God's goodness, and since Jesus perfectly reflects God's nature, the life of Christ is a powerful lens through which we see God's goodness.

1. God's Goodness in Creation (Genesis 1:31)

In the beginning, everything God created He declared was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). The beauty, complexity, and order of creation reflect God's goodness. Jesus, as the Creator (John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:16), reflects God's goodness in the world He made, revealing that everything created was designed out of love and purpose.

2. God's Compassion and Mercy (Exodus 34:6)

In Exodus 34:6, God describes Himself as "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness." This aspect of God's goodness is demonstrated in Jesus' life. For instance:

- Healing the Sick and Suffering: Jesus shows profound compassion by healing the sick, the blind, the lame, and the demon-possessed (Matthew 4:24, Matthew 9:35).

- Forgiving Sins: Jesus forgave sins, showing God's mercy in action (Luke 7:47-48, Matthew 9:2).

3. God's Patience (Psalm 103:8)

Psalm 103:8 says, "The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love." God's patience is vividly illustrated in the life of Jesus, especially in His dealings with His disciples. Despite their mistakes, misunderstandings, and lack of faith, Jesus showed patience (Matthew 17:17, Mark 9:19), teaching that God is long-suffering and not quick to condemn. 2 Peter 3:9 reads, "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

4. God's Love for the Lost (Ezekiel 34:11-12)

In Ezekiel 34:11-12, God promises to search for His scattered sheep and bring them back. This is fulfilled in the New Testament when Jesus seeks out sinners and invites them into the Kingdom of God. Jesus tells parables like the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7) and the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) to show God's immense love for those who are lost and His desire to restore them.

5. God's Generosity (Psalm 23:1, James 1:5)

God's goodness is shown through His provision and generosity. Psalm 23 begins, "The LORD is my shepherd; I lack nothing." In the New Testament, Jesus embodies this as He provides for the needs of others, such as when He fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish (John 6:9-13). He also promises that God will generously provide for those who seek His Kingdom first (Matthew 6:33).

6. God's Goodness in Forgiveness (Psalm 103:12, Micah 7:18-19)

God's forgiveness is an essential part of His goodness. Psalm 103:12 states, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." In Micah 7:18-19, God delights in showing mercy and pardoning sins. Jesus reveals this in His life, especially through acts like forgiving the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) and telling the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35), emphasizing the importance of forgiving others as God forgives us.

7. God's Justice and Righteousness (Psalm 89:14)

Psalm 89:14 declares, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne." God is just and

righteous, which is revealed in Jesus' teachings. Jesus' ministry emphasized God's righteous standard (Matthew 5:17-20), and He lived a perfect, sinless life in full obedience to God's Law, showing us what true righteousness looks like. Furthermore, Jesus demonstrated God's justice in how He dealt with the religious leaders, calling them out for their hypocrisy and injustice (Matthew 23:23-28).

8. God's Goodness in His Sacrifice (Romans 5:8)

The ultimate example of God's goodness is His willingness to sacrifice His Son for the redemption of humanity (Romans 5:8). Jesus' death on the cross is the greatest expression of God's love and goodness, as He paid the penalty for our sins, offering salvation to all who believe (John 3:16).

9. God's Goodness in Giving the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17)

In John 14:16-17, Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit, the "Comforter" or "Advocate", to be with His disciples. The giving of the Holy Spirit is a reflection of God's goodness, as the Spirit empowers believers, guides them into truth, convicts them of the righteousness they have in Christ, and comforts them in times of need. This presence of God in believers' lives demonstrates His ongoing care and love.

10. God's Faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Lamentations 3:22-23 declares, "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." Jesus' life and ministry exemplified God's faithfulness, as He fulfilled the promises of God to restore Israel and bring salvation to the world. Even when faced with the cross, Jesus

trusted in God's faithfulness, declaring, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Chapter 7

Goodness (agathōsýnē) - Living Generously Small Group Questions

1. How does the Biblical concept of “goodness” (agathōsýnē) challenge our understanding of generosity, and in what ways can we live out goodness not just in our actions, but in our attitudes toward others, especially when it’s inconvenient or costly?

2. Paul commends the believers in Romans 15:14 for being “full of goodness” and able to instruct others. How does the expression of goodness in our lives, as a Fruit of the Spirit, empower us to serve and teach others in our communities? What role does generosity play in our ability to be a positive influence on those around us?

3. In Ephesians 5:9, goodness is connected with righteousness and truth as part of the “fruit of the light.” How can we ensure that our acts of generosity and goodness are aligned with God’s truth and righteousness, rather than being motivated by selfishness or external pressures?

4. Paul prays for the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 1:11 to fulfill “every resolve for good and every work of faith by His power.” What role does faith play in our ability to be generous and live out goodness, especially when faced with challenges or personal sacrifices? How does this shift our perspective on generosity as something we rely on God’s strength to do, rather than our own?

5. Jesus demonstrated perfect moral integrity, consistently aligning His will with the Father's, even in the face of temptation and opposition. In what areas of your life do you find it most difficult to align your will with God's? How can you rely on the Holy Spirit to help you reflect Jesus' goodness in these areas?

6. What's one more insight you had in this chapter on the Fruit of goodness?

Chapter 8
Faithfulness (pístis) - God's Faithfulness to Us



The fruit of faithfulness is born out of Jesus' faithfulness. This is a key to keep in the forefront of our minds as we progress through this chapter. Faithful "pístis": a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation in the Kingdom of God."⁴⁷

So, it is essential we see the fuller definition of salvation in Christ (sōtēría) extends beyond everlasting life and includes rescue or safety, deliverance, health, salvation, and to save.⁴⁸

1. The Fruit of Faithfulness Comes from Jesus' Faithfulness. The "fruit of faithfulness" refers to the outcome or result of a life that is marked by trusting in and receiving the grace of Jesus Christ. His steadfastness in fulfilling God's will, even to the point of death on the cross, is the model and source of the believer's faithfulness. Everything we need is found in Jesus. Our response to His faithfulness is to accept by faith all that He has purchased for us. Embracing grace leads us to a life of worship. As Ephesians 1:3 says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

We don't generate faithfulness on our own; we receive it as a fruit of the relationship we have with Christ, who is our model, our power, and our motivation.

2. The Meaning of "Faithfulness" (Pístis)

The term "pístis" (faith) often carries a richer meaning than just "belief" or "intellectual assent".

⁴⁷www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4102/niv/mgnt/0-1/

⁴⁸www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4991/niv/mgnt/0-1/

It implies a conviction or trust that leads to action. Specifically, *pístis* in the New Testament refers to a deep conviction that Jesus is the Messiah—the anointed One sent to save humanity. This belief permeates every part of a believer’s life, shaping their actions, decisions, and relationships. It’s a foundational, all-encompassing faith that influences how one understands the world and interacts with it, reflecting a life of union with Christ.

3. The Fuller Definition of Salvation (*Sōtēría*)

“*Sōtēría*” translated as “salvation”, is typically understood as eternal life—the future hope of being in God’s presence forever. But the term has a far broader scope in Scripture.

In the Biblical context, “*sōtēría*” is much more than simply “going to Heaven” when we die. It refers to the deliverance that God offers through Christ. This rescue is holistic and encompasses several dimensions:

- Eternal life: This is the ultimate promise of salvation—a life with God that extends beyond death.
- Rescue from Sin and Death: Salvation in Christ is a deliverance from the power of sin, death, and the forces of evil.
- Spiritual Healing: It includes healing from brokenness, guilt, and shame. The work of Christ restores us spiritually.
- Safety and Protection: Salvation brings us into the safety of God’s care. We are protected from harm and eternal separation from God.

- Physical Healing: sōtēría also touches the body, bringing healing from sickness, pain, and physical suffering, whether through miraculous acts of God or the eventual Resurrection of the body in the fullness of God's Kingdom. "By His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

- Emotional Healing: Salvation brings healing to our hearts, restoring us from the emotional scars of trauma, loss, rejection, and despair. It enables us to experience peace, joy, and wholeness amid life's emotional struggles.

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair" (Isaiah 61:1-3).

- Mental Healing: Christ's salvation brings restoration to the mind, offering freedom from anxiety, confusion, and fear. The mind of Christ renews our thoughts, allowing us to align our minds with the truth of God's Word and the hope found in His promises. "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7).

- Deliverance in the Here and Now: Jesus' salvation isn't just future-focused; it also brings deliverance in our present lives—freedom from bondage, peace amidst trials, and strength to endure hardship.

This is a crucial point because the fuller definition of salvation makes it clear that Christ's faithfulness to save us encompasses not only eternal life but also impacts our daily lives and offers us the restoration of wholeness in every area of life. Salvation isn't just a ticket to Heaven; it's the transformative work of God in every aspect of our existence, from our spiritual state to our mental and emotional well-being, to our physical bodies, and ultimately our eternal future.

4. Faith in the Context of Salvation

Keeping these definitions in mind, we can now understand that "faith" (πίστις) isn't only about intellectual assent to a set of beliefs. It is an active, living trust in Jesus as the Messiah who not only secures our eternal future but also actively saves and restores us in the present. This is why the "fruit of faithfulness" grows out of Christ's own faithfulness—it is His ongoing work of salvation that sustains and empowers our faith.

Jesus is the source and sustainer of our faith, which is an active conviction in His identity and work as the Messiah. Salvation is the reality we experience as we live out our faith in Christ, and it should be a key element of our ongoing journey with Him and a witness to the world. "For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose" (Philippians 2:13).

Our world is filled with chaos and uncertainty, a place where people seek refuge in temporary things—whether that be relationships, material possessions, or even their own wisdom. But Nahum reminds us that the only true refuge is found in the Lord. "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him" (Nahum 1:7).

Trust in His Goodness. In times of trouble, remind yourself of His faithfulness.

Reflect on His Care: Take time to reflect on how God has cared for you in the past. Write down instances where you've seen His faithfulness. When you're overwhelmed by anxiety or fear, repeat to yourself, "The LORD is good". Let this truth anchor your soul.

God's commitment to you is not just a promise He made but an expression of His very nature. God is not like us. He does not change. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). And because of that, His promises to us are unshakable.

When we face difficulties, when we encounter seasons of doubt or discouragement, it is easy to feel like God might be distant or disappointed in us. We might wonder if we've done something to make Him angry or question whether He'll still show up in our lives. But the reality is that God's faithfulness isn't a reaction to our actions; it is a steady, constant presence in our lives. His commitment is based on His nature, not ours.

The Fruit of Faithfulness: Remembering Jesus

"Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my Gospel" (2 Timothy 2:8).

When life isn't going according to my plans, when things aren't unfolding as I expected, it's easy to feel like something has gone wrong. And, honestly, when I put it that way, it sounds almost ridiculous. I've come to realize that when things aren't going how I think they should, the answer isn't to doubt God's

faithfulness or question His commitment to me. The answer is to remember Jesus.

Paul's words to Timothy remind us of this essential truth: The Gospel—the good news—is all about Jesus. "Remember Jesus". That's the key. In moments of confusion, disappointment, or hardship, the anchor for our faith is not our understanding of the situation but our relationship with the One who overcame it all. When we look at life through the lens of Jesus—His death, Resurrection, and Ascension—our perspective on everything changes.

Paul uses the Greek word "mnēmoneuō"—to actively call to mind, to recall intentionally.⁴⁹ It's a deliberate practice. To "remember Jesus" means to fix our minds on Him, especially when circumstances make it difficult. Think back to those times in your life when things looked one way, but in hindsight, God was working in ways you couldn't have imagined. Those unexpected twists were part of His faithfulness. Remember Jesus.

Remember the faithfulness of God by remembering Jesus—who, though dead, was raised from the dead, breaking the power of sin and death forever. Jesus is the living proof of God's commitment to His promises. As Paul says, "This is my Gospel", the good news of salvation in Christ. When we struggle to see God's faithfulness at the moment, we can always look back at Jesus, remembering that He was faithful unto death, and now He lives in us.

Next, Paul speaks about his suffering for the sake of the Gospel:

⁴⁹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3421/kjv/tr/0-1/

“For which I am suffering, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s Word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory” (2 Timothy 2:9-10).

Paul’s chains don’t stop God’s Word. His imprisonment doesn’t hinder the Gospel. The Word of God can’t be chained because it’s rooted in the faithfulness of God, not in the circumstances of the moment. Paul’s endurance—his willingness to suffer and press on—is all for one purpose: to bring the message of salvation in Christ to others so that they too might experience the eternal glory of God.

When Paul says, “I endure everything”, he’s not just talking about personal hardships. He’s talking about enduring for the sake of the Gospel—because he understands that salvation is not just for him, but for all who will believe. This, Paul says, is a trustworthy saying.

But what’s the foundation of this salvation? Paul’s answer is simple: “Your salvation is based on your union with Christ”. His death is your death, His life is your life.

Salvation isn’t about escaping life’s storms it’s about being in Christ, our refuge in the storm. As Psalm 46:1 reminds us, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” In Christ, we find peace not because the storms are gone, but because He is with us through them, and in Him, we are sustained, we will endure, and we will reign in life (Romans 5:17).

In the next few verses, Paul lays out a powerful statement about the life we now have in Christ. He writes:

“Here is a trustworthy saying:
If we died with Him, we will also live with Him;
If we endure, we will also reign with Him.
If we disown Him, He will also disown us.
If we are faithless, He remains faithful,
for He cannot disown himself” (2 Timothy 2:11-13).

To fully appreciate the trustworthiness of this verse, let’s take a closer look at the Greek. The word “apisteō” (ἀπιστέω), which we translate as “faithless” or “unbelieving,” refers to moments when we struggle to trust or when our faith falters.⁵⁰ Yet, even when we find ourselves faithless, Christ remains faithful—“pistos” (πιστός), meaning “true,” “reliable,” and “worthy of trust.”⁵¹ Christ will never depart from His faithfulness. He is always true to His Word, always with us, and always holding us fast. So, even in our moments of doubt or failure, we can stand firm in the promise that He is with us and will not forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

At the heart of this trustworthy statement is a deep truth about our union with Christ. First, we have died with Christ—meaning our old selves, our past lives, our sin and shame, were crucified with Him. And because of that, “we now live with Him”—a new life in Christ that is marked by Resurrection power, a life that cannot be undone.

This union with Christ is not just about living, though—it’s also about enduring and reigning. Notice that endurance and reigning are linked to our union with Christ. They are not about how hard we try but about the strength He provides through His faithfulness. We can endure hardships, persevere

⁵⁰www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g569/kjv/tr/0-1/

⁵¹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4103/kjv/tr/0-1/

through suffering, and live victorious lives because He is faithful to sustain us.

If salvation were about our performance, we'd be left in a constant state of insecurity, wondering whether we'd been faithful enough. But it's not about our faithfulness—it's about His. "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot disown Himself." Even when we stumble, when our faith falters, God's faithfulness stands firm. It's not contingent on us; it's grounded in His unchanging nature.

The Gospel tells us that "if we die with Him, we live with Him. But there's more. If we endure, we will also reign with Him." This life of endurance and reigning doesn't wait until we die and go to Heaven. It starts now. We don't just survive life in Christ, we thrive in it because of Him. We reign over the circumstances, not because we are strong, but because Christ is in us and God's favor is upon our lives.

This is a reality for those who trust in Jesus. The Christian life isn't about passive waiting for Heaven; it's about active participation in the reign of Christ on Earth. "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven" (Matthew 6:10). We endure in Jesus' faithfulness and we reign in His victory. God's commitment to us is the heartbeat of the Gospel.

But there's a difficult reality to consider in verse 12: "If we disown Him, He will also disown us." This sounds like a threat, but it's not. It's a stark reminder of the difference between those who truly belong to Christ and those who reject Him outright. Paul isn't talking about moments of weakness or doubt but about a willful rejection of Christ. Paul is speaking to those who persist in their unbelief and fail to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Paul concludes with the powerful truth: “If we are faithless, He remains faithful.” Our security is not based on the consistency of our faith but on the unchanging faithfulness of God. “He cannot disown Himself”—and because we are united to Him, He will never disown us.

God is faithful, even when we are not. Our salvation is not upheld by our strength or constancy but by God’s grace. In the highs and lows of life, in moments of faithfulness and moments of doubt, we can trust that He remains faithful.

A.W. Pink captures this perfectly: “God is true. His Word of promise is sure. In all His relations with His people, God is faithful. He may be safely relied upon.”⁵²

God’s faithfulness means that He never forgets His promises, never fails, never changes His mind, and never takes back a promise. It’s not just a comforting thought—it’s a powerful truth that undergirds everything in the Christian life. When we face challenges, when we suffer, when we feel abandoned, we remember Jesus—the faithful One who died and rose again.

In Him, we don’t just live; we endure, and we reign. This is the trustworthy saying: “If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him.” Remember Jesus, and you will remember the faithfulness of God that never fails.

⁵²Arthur Pink. The Faithfulness of God. Grace Online Library. graceonlinelibrary.org/doctrine-theology/doctrine-of-god/attributes-of-god/the-faithfulness-of-god-by-arthur-pink/

Standing on Christ's Faithfulness

The Apostle Paul's final exhortation in 2 Timothy 2:14 is simple but profound: "Keep reminding them of these things..." This is what we must do—remind ourselves and others that our salvation is grounded in Christ's faithfulness, not ours. We stand on His promises, not our performance. This is the foundation of the Christian life—a life of faithfulness that flows from Christ's faithfulness.

In the face of struggles, doubts, and failures, we can rest assured that God's faithfulness will never fail us. And this truth is not just for the future; it's for today. As we stand firm in Christ, we can endure all things and reign with Him—right here, right now. This is the Gospel of Grace, and it is the most trustworthy thing you can build your life upon.

Living in the Light of God's Commitment

Understanding the significance of God's unwavering commitment doesn't just reassure us; it empowers us to live with confidence and peace. It means that no matter what we go through, we don't have to fear rejection or abandonment. We know that we are held in the hands of a faithful God who will never leave us nor forsake us.

This truth also transforms our relationships with others. When we understand the depth of God's faithfulness to us, it changes how we relate to those around us. We are freed from the need to control or manipulate relationships because we know we are already loved and accepted by the One who matters most. We no longer need to prove ourselves or perform for approval. Instead, we live out of the assurance that God's faithfulness is enough.

Moreover, God's unwavering commitment to us challenges us to extend that same faithfulness to others. As we grow in our understanding of God's love for us, we become more equipped to love and commit to others in the same way—steadfastly, unconditionally, and without reserve.

The significance of God's faithfulness is not just a comfort to us in times of need; it is also the foundation of a new way of living. It transforms how we see ourselves, how we approach God, and how we interact with the world. God's unwavering commitment to us is not just a truth we acknowledge, but a reality we live out in every aspect of our lives.

The Ultimate Promise in Christ: "He Cannot Disown You"

Ultimately, the significance of God's faithfulness is captured in the profound statement that He cannot disown us. It means that no matter what we face, no matter how weak or frail we feel, God is not going to leave us behind. We are His, and He is ours. This is the deepest security any believer can experience—the security of knowing that we are eternally held by the God who made us loves us, and will never, ever forsake us.

So, when life feels overwhelming, when you feel like your faith is faltering, when the weight of your failures seems too much to bear, remember: God's commitment to you is unbreakable. He remains faithful, even when you are faithless. He is holding you fast, and He cannot disown you.

This is the foundation of our hope. This is the reason we can stand firm, confident in the love of the One who holds us. And this is why the Gospel is such good news—it is a promise of God's unwavering faithfulness

to us, a faithfulness that is not based on our ability to be perfect, but on Christ's perfect work on our behalf. The significance of God's faithfulness is everything. It is the reason we can face each day with hope, trust, and peace. It is the reason we can know with absolute certainty that no matter what comes, we are secure in Him.

The Faithfulness of Jesus to Bear the Fruit of Faithfulness in Our Lives

Now that we've explored the incredible depth of God's unwavering commitment to us through Christ, we come to the next natural question: How do we, as followers of Jesus, live out that same faithfulness in our own lives? How do we, as imperfect people, reflect God's perfect faithfulness? The answer lies not in trying to muster up our strength to be faithful but in drawing from the unshakable faithfulness of Jesus Himself.

When we consider the faithfulness of Jesus, we're not just looking at a set of principles to follow, but at a living, breathing example of faithfulness that is meant to be infused into our lives through union with Him. Jesus, in His perfect faithfulness, shows us that faithfulness isn't a one-time decision or a characteristic we must try to "build" on our own—it's a fruit that is borne as we remain connected to Him, the Vine. In this way, our faithfulness isn't something we produce by our effort, but something that naturally flows from His faithfulness working in us.

1. Faithfulness Rooted in the Faithfulness of Jesus

The foundation of our faithfulness is not our ability to be faithful, but the fact that Jesus was—and is—faithful to us. His faithfulness is the soil from which our faithfulness grows. Our ability to be faithful is

simply a response to the incredible faithfulness of Jesus toward us.

Jesus' faithfulness is seen in His unwavering commitment to God's plan, even when it led to the cross. He faithfully fulfilled the mission of salvation, even when it meant suffering, betrayal, and death. His faithfulness is not contingent on circumstances, nor is it swayed by our unfaithfulness. The more we reflect on His faithfulness—the way He remained committed to us, even when we were far from Him—the more we realize that His faithfulness is the model for how we are called to live.

Jesus Himself said in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing." Faithfulness is a fruit that comes from abiding in Jesus, remaining in His love, and allowing His faithfulness to flow through us.

2. Faithfulness in Our Relationship with Jesus

To bear the fruit of faithfulness in our lives, we must first remain connected to Jesus. This means abiding in Him daily—through prayer, reading His Word, and spending time in His presence. It means cultivating an ongoing relationship with Him where we allow His faithfulness to continually shape and transform us.

As we abide in Him, we are reminded of His promises. We are encouraged by His example. We are empowered by His grace. And through this relationship, we find the strength to remain faithful to Him in return. The more we rest in His faithfulness, the more we reflect that faithfulness in our own lives.

Faithfulness, therefore, isn't a burden or a striving. It's a response to Jesus' faithfulness that naturally flows

from a heart that is captivated by His love. As we recognize that His faithfulness never fails, we find ourselves more and more committed to following Him, living out His truth, and fulfilling His calling on our lives.

3. Faithfulness in Our Relationships with Others

As we experience the faithfulness of Jesus in our own lives, we are called to extend that same faithfulness to those around us. Jesus didn't just model faithfulness in His relationship with God; He also modeled it in His relationships with people. He remained faithful to His disciples, to the broken, to the outcast, and to the lost.

When we draw from the well of His faithfulness, we're able to mirror that same commitment in our relationships with others. To be faithful to others means being dependable, loyal, and steadfast—just as Jesus has been to us. It means showing up for people, even when it's inconvenient, and standing by them through both the good and bad seasons.

Jesus' faithfulness empowers us to be faithful in difficult relationships, to forgive when it's hard, and to love even when we feel unappreciated or unnoticed. When we fail, we remember that Jesus was faithful to forgive us, and He empowers us to extend that same grace to others. In this way, we reflect His character to the world around us and bear witness to the love and faithfulness that He has shown to us.

4. Faithfulness in Our Work and Calling

Just as Jesus was faithful in completing the work that God gave Him to do, we too are called to be faithful in the work and calling God has entrusted to us. Whether we're serving in ministry, working in the marketplace,

or caring for our families, our faithfulness is not about doing things perfectly, but about doing them unto the Lord. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23-24).

Faithfulness in our work means doing everything with the mindset that we are working for the Lord, not for human approval. It means being consistent and diligent, even in the unseen or mundane tasks, knowing that our work has eternal significance when done in faithfulness to God. As we abide in the faithfulness of Jesus, we are empowered to persevere, to endure, and to give our best in whatever God has called us to.

In 1 Corinthians 4:2, Paul reminds us that “it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.” Our calling is not about success or outcomes; it’s about being faithful to the task God has given us, knowing that He will honor our efforts as we trust in His faithfulness. We can do this because Christ lives in us and the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of faithfulness out of us.

5. Faithfulness During Trials

One of the most powerful ways we reflect Jesus’ faithfulness is in how we respond to trials and suffering. Jesus, in His faithfulness, endured the cross for the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:2). He didn’t shrink back in fear or abandon the mission, even when it was painful. His faithfulness in suffering demonstrates the kind of endurance and perseverance we are called to in our trials.

When we are faithful to Jesus in difficult times, we reflect His character to the world. We show others that the faithfulness of Jesus isn't just a theory or a concept—it's something that sustains us in the hardest moments of life. As we rely on His strength, we find the power to remain faithful, to endure, and to trust that God is with us through it all.

6. Bearing the Fruit of Faithfulness

Ultimately, the fruit of faithfulness in our lives is the natural outgrowth of being deeply rooted in the faithfulness of Jesus. As we reflect on His unflinching commitment to us, we are empowered to embody that same faithfulness in every area of our lives—toward God, toward others, in our work, and in the trials we face.

It is in this union with Christ, where His faithfulness becomes our strength, that we can bear the fruit of faithfulness. As we live out this faithfulness, we not only honor God, but we also become living testimonies to the world of His unwavering love, His covenant promises, and His unchanging nature.

By looking to Jesus as the ultimate example of faithfulness, and by depending on His faithfulness to carry us, we can live out our calling to be faithful in all things. And in doing so, we bear fruit that glorifies God, strengthens others, and demonstrates the incredible faithfulness of our Savior. Jesus completed every work He was sent to do and His final words before His death was, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

Examples of the Fruit of Faithfulness from the New Testament: Miraculous Outcomes Through Faith in Jesus

Now that we've established how the faithfulness of Jesus empowers us to live out our faithfulness, let's explore some key examples from the New Testament where people's faith in Jesus led to miraculous outcomes—not because of their strength, but because they trusted in His faithfulness. These stories show us that when we rely on Jesus, His power works through us, producing extraordinary outcomes.

1. The Woman with the Issue of Blood: Faithfulness in Reaching for Jesus

In Mark 5:25-34, we encounter a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years. Despite spending all her money on doctors, she was no closer to a cure. Desperate, she heard about Jesus and, in faith, believed that even touching His cloak could heal her.

The woman thought to herself in Mark 5:28, "If I just touch His clothes, I will be healed." She pushed through the crowds and touched Jesus' garment. Immediately, the bleeding stopped, and she felt in her body that she was healed. Jesus, recognizing that power had gone out from Him, turned and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" When the woman came forward and confessed, Jesus responded, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (Mark 5:34).

This woman's faith was simple but unwavering. She didn't need a grand gesture or a dramatic prayer—she just trusted in Jesus' power to heal. Her faithfulness to believe in Jesus' ability to heal resulted in a miraculous transformation. This story reminds us that faith, even when it's small or seemingly imperfect, can lead to extraordinary outcomes when it's placed in the faithfulness of Jesus.

2. The Centurion's Faith: Faithfulness in Believing Without Seeing

In Matthew 8:5-13, we find the story of a Roman centurion whose servant was paralyzed and suffering. The centurion, a man of authority, understood the power of words and believed that Jesus could heal his servant with just a word. He told Jesus, "Lord, I do not deserve to have You come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed" (Matthew 8:8).

Jesus marveled at his faith and said, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith" (Matthew 8:10). At that moment, the servant was healed. The centurion's faith was remarkable not because of his status or the works he had done, but because he believed in the authority and power of Jesus. His faith was rooted in the trust he placed in Jesus' word.

This is a powerful example of how faith in Jesus' ability to heal—without needing to fully comprehend how or why—leads to miraculous outcomes. The centurion's faithfulness to believe in Jesus' words led to the healing of his servant, showcasing how faith in the faithfulness of Jesus produces miraculous results.

3. Peter Walking on Water: Faithfulness to Step Out in Trust

One of the most iconic moments of faith in the New Testament occurs in Matthew 14:22-33. After Jesus fed the 5,000, He sent His disciples ahead in a boat while He went up to pray. As the disciples were in the middle of the lake, a storm came up, and they saw Jesus walking on the water toward them. They were terrified, thinking He was a ghost, but Jesus

immediately reassured them, saying, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

Peter, always eager to take bold steps, replied, "Lord, if it's You, tell me to come to You on the water." Jesus said, "Come." And Peter, in faith, stepped out of the boat and began walking on the water toward Jesus. It was His Word that gave Peter the authority to do something supernatural. Peter's faith was not in his ability to walk on water, but in the faithfulness of Jesus to enable him to do so. The same is true for us—there are incredible things God calls us to do, things that may seem impossible, but when we keep our focus on Jesus, we will see His miracles unfold in our lives and in the lives of others too.

"But when he saw the wind, he became afraid and began to sink. He cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out His hand and caught him, saying, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Peter's faith in Jesus led him to do the impossible—walk on water. However, when his focus shifted from Jesus to the wind and waves, he began to doubt.

The moment he took his eyes off Jesus and saw the wind, fear crept in. The Bible says, "But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'" (Matthew 14:30). Fear interrupted his faith. As long as Peter's eyes were fixed on Jesus, he walked on water. But the moment he focused on the wind and waves, he started sinking.

Here's the truth: The wind didn't make Peter sink—it was his focus. The storm was always there, but as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus, the storm didn't matter. The same is true for us. When we're walking by faith, challenges and distractions will always rise up, but our victory lies in where we place our focus.

Jesus is the source of our faith, and His faithfulness is what carries us through.

When Peter cried out, “Lord, save me,” Jesus immediately reached out His hand and caught him. Jesus said, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:31). Notice that even though Peter’s faith faltered, Jesus still reached out to him. This is such an important lesson: Even when our faith is small or weak, Jesus’ faithfulness is unwavering. Jesus didn’t abandon Peter because of his doubt. He caught him and didn’t let him sink.

This moment reveals how faith in Jesus allows us to experience the miraculous, but it also teaches us the importance of keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the faithful One. Even though Peter faltered, his act of faith—stepping out of the boat—was still met with Jesus’ grace, and he experienced a miracle.

A Key Insight from Peter’s Walk on Water

Peter’s experience teaches us an important principle: Miracles aren’t about our perfection, but about keeping our eyes on the One who is perfect. You see, Peter’s ability to walk on water had nothing to do with the wind or the waves—it had everything to do with Jesus’ call and Peter’s willingness to respond in faith. It was the Word of Jesus that empowered Peter to do the impossible.

And here’s something amazing to consider: When Jesus reached out to catch Peter, they didn’t just stay in the water. They got back in the boat together. Imagine that! How did they get back into the boat? There’s no mention of Jesus pulling Peter up into the boat with some sort of miraculous rope or ladder, but we can infer that Jesus and Peter must have walked back into the boat together. This is a beautiful picture

of how Jesus doesn't just rescue us; He leads us back to a place of peace and safety.

The result? "Then those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God'" (Matthew 14:33). The miracle not only impacted Peter but also those in the boat. Peter walked on water twice: first when he stepped out of the boat in faith, and again when he walked back into the boat with Jesus.

This is a powerful reminder that faith in Jesus, even when it falters, leads to miraculous outcomes. When we fix our eyes on Him, we will see His power work through us. And just as Jesus caught Peter, He's there to catch us when we falter—lifting us, keeping us, and bringing us safely through every storm.

The Faithfulness of Jesus Empowers Our Faith

When we are facing challenges—whether it's health struggles, financial difficulties, or personal crises—keep your eyes on Jesus. The winds and waves of life will always try to pull your attention away, but remember, those external circumstances have nothing to do with whether you can walk on water, or whether God's power is at work in your life.

Peter's story teaches us that walking in faith doesn't mean we won't face storms. The storm might get even stronger as we step out in faith. But the moment we look to Jesus—who is faithful and unchanging—His power takes over. Jesus is the source of our miracles—not the storms we face, not the reports we hear, not the symptoms we feel, but His Word and His faithfulness. When you fix your eyes on Jesus, you can walk over your challenges, just like Peter walked on the water.

Remember, it's not about how strong your faith is, but about whether your focus is on the faithfulness of Jesus. The winds and waves may come, but Jesus has already overcome. Keep your eyes on Him, and you will experience the miraculous.

4. The Healing of the Paralytic Lowered Through the Roof: Faithfulness in Community

In Mark 2:1-12, we read about four men who carried their paralyzed friend to Jesus. Unable to get near Jesus because of the crowd, they made a hole in the roof and lowered the man down in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, He told the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5), and then healed him physically, saying, "Get up, take your mat and go home."

The faithfulness of these four men in bringing their friend to Jesus led to both his spiritual and physical healing. Jesus responded to their collective faith—faith that was willing to go to great lengths to get their friend to Jesus. This story highlights the power of community and the fruit that comes from faithfully interceding for others. It also shows that Jesus honors faith in action, and He often works miracles through the faithfulness of those around us.

5. The Blind Beggar's Faith: Faithfulness in Crying Out to Jesus Amid the Crowd Trying to Silence Him

In Mark 10:46-52, we read about a blind man named Bartimaeus, who sat by the roadside begging. When he heard that Jesus was passing by, he began to cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped and called for him. Bartimaeus threw aside his cloak, jumped to his feet, and came to Jesus. Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man replied, "Rabbi, I want to see." Jesus said, "Go, your faith has healed you." Immediately, he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Bartimaeus' faith was not passive. He persisted in calling out to Jesus, even when others told him to be silent. Bartimaeus didn't let others prevent him from reaching out to Jesus and receiving his miracle. Jesus responded to his faith.

Faith in Jesus Produces the Miraculous

These New Testament examples show how faith in Jesus, whether it's a simple act of trust or a bold step of obedience, leads to miraculous outcomes. Each story highlights that the fruit of faithfulness doesn't depend on human strength, wisdom, or ability. Instead, it flows from trusting in the power and faithfulness of Jesus. When we trust in Jesus, miracles happen—sometimes in unexpected ways, and unexpected times, but always through His grace and power.

Just like these individuals, when we place our faith in the faithfulness of Jesus, we can expect to see His power manifest in our lives. Whether it's physical healing, provision, restoration, or breakthroughs, the fruit of faithfulness in our lives is not a result of our perfection, but of our trust in His perfect faithfulness. When we walk by faith in the faithfulness of Jesus, we too can experience the miraculous.

Chapter 8

Faithfulness (pístis) - God's Faithfulness to Us Small Group Questions

1. In what ways can we experience the "fruit of faithfulness" in our daily lives, and how can we remind ourselves that it is rooted in Jesus' faithfulness rather than our efforts?

2. How does a broader understanding of salvation (including rescue, healing, and deliverance in the present, not just eternal life) change the way we view our relationship with Jesus and our daily struggles?

3. How does understanding that our salvation is grounded in Christ's faithfulness (rather than our own) change the way we approach struggles and doubts in our spiritual journey?

4. In what ways can we actively participate in "reigning" with Christ today, not just in the future? Paul says that we are not just surviving life in Christ, but actively reigning with Him now. How does this truth affect the way we live out our faith in the present, particularly in the face of hardship or opposition?

5. How does understanding that God’s faithfulness to us is unshakeable and not based on our actions change the way you approach difficulties in your life? How can this truth empower you to reflect God’s faithfulness in your relationships and work?

6. In what areas of your life are you currently focused on the “winds and waves” instead of keeping your eyes on Jesus? How can refocusing on His faithfulness help you overcome the challenges you’re facing right now? What would it look like to step out in faith, even when the storm seems overwhelming?

Chapter 9
Gentleness (praiótēs) - Strength Under Control



Praiótēs: gentleness, by implication, humility:—
meekness.⁵³

Scripture Verses on Gentleness

1. Proverbs 15:1

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

- This verse highlights gentleness as a tool for peace. When we respond gently, we disarm potential conflict. Gentleness prevents escalation and fosters harmony.

2. Matthew 11:29

“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

- Jesus identifies Himself as gentle, offering rest to those burdened by life’s struggles. This invitation to learn from Him is the call to embrace gentleness as a lifestyle, a key component of discipleship.

“Jesus invites us to join with Him in “koinonia” fellowship (1 John 1:3). To take His yoke is to give Him the reins of your life. It’s saying, “Lord, not my will but Thy will be done.”

We are all yoked to something. We may be yoked to the demands of our bosses or the expectations of our customers. We may be yoked to duty and religion. The yokes we bear are burdensome.

⁵³www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4236/kjv/tr/0-1/

They wear us out and grind us down. But when we yoke ourselves to Jesus, we find true rest for our souls.⁵⁴ To find rest is to submit to Jesus' teaching (His yoke). In a world of heavy burdens, Grace comes offering rest. Grace declares, "It is finished, the work is done," and faith responds, "Thank you, Jesus!"

3. Ephesians 4:2

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

- Gentleness is closely connected with humility and patience. The call here is to cultivate these qualities in our relationships, bearing with others in love and patience. Allow the Holy Spirit to bear the fruit of gentleness because Christ lives in you.

4. Philippians 4:5

"Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near."

- Our gentleness should be a public testimony of God's presence. This verse encourages believers to reflect gentleness to everyone, demonstrating that the Lord is near and active in their lives.

In challenging times, it's easy to forget how close God truly is (Philippians 4:5). When we're overwhelmed by difficulties, He can sometimes feel distant as if He's far away. But the truth is, He is always near to us because our lives are hidden in Christ (Colossians 3:3), we can reach out to Him through prayer at any moment, no matter the circumstances.

⁵⁴Paul Ellis. The Grace Commentary. www.thegracecommentary.com/matthew-11/#matthew11v29

In Philippians 4:6, Paul urges believers, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

When we let worry take over, it can pull us away from the peace and gentleness that God wants to cultivate in our hearts. Worry often brings a sense of disconnection from God, making us focus on our problems rather than His nearness and provision. It stirs up anxiety, impatience, and restlessness—all things that oppose the calm, peaceful spirit of gentleness described in Galatians 5:23.

We might feel out of control when anxiety takes over, but prayer helps us remember that God is in control, and as we surrender our worries to Him, patience returns. When we replace worry with prayer, we align our hearts with God’s peace, and His gentleness flows through us. We are enabled through the Holy Spirit to trust in God’s sovereignty and to respond to life’s challenges with the gentleness and patience that reflect Christ’s character.

As we cast our anxieties on Him, trusting that He is near, we experience His peace—a peace that quiets our hearts and replaces our anxiety.

5. 1 Timothy 6:11

“But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.”

- Gentleness is listed as one of the qualities to pursue actively. It is a part of the virtuous character of a godly person, something to allow the Holy Spirit to express through your life.

6. Titus 3:2

“To slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.”

- Gentleness is associated with peace and consideration. It’s a mark of maturity in Christ, where we treat others with respect and dignity, no matter their status. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

7. James 3:17

“But the wisdom that comes from Heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”

- In the NIV, the word “considerate” is used, but in some older translations, like the ESV and KJV, the word “gentle” is used instead. The Greek word translated as “considerate” or “gentle” is ἐπιεικῆς (epieikēs), which conveys the idea of gentleness, forbearance, mildness, or reasonableness.⁵⁵ It refers to a demeanor of kindness and calmness, which is exactly what we understand as gentleness in the Biblical sense.

In the context of James 3:17, the wisdom from above is described as “gentle”, or “considerate”, meaning that true wisdom is not harsh, abrasive, or driven by selfish ambition. Instead, it is marked by a gentle, humble attitude that seeks to bring peace and harmony, reflecting the character of Christ.

⁵⁵www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1933/niv/mgnt/0-1/

The wisdom that comes from God embodies gentleness. This wisdom is contrasted with the harshness of worldly wisdom. Those who are wise in Christ reflect His gentleness in their behavior and interactions.

8. 2 Timothy 2:25

“Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.”

- Even in correction, gentleness is essential. The goal is not to win arguments but to lead people to truth through compassionate, respectful instruction.

1. Gentleness as a Spirit-Led Quality:

Gentleness, as part of the Fruit of the Spirit, is not a mere personality trait but a supernatural quality that reflects the nature of Christ. The gentleness seen in the Bible is rooted in God’s own character, as we see in the verses above (*exempli gratia*, Matthew 11:29, where Jesus describes Himself as gentle). When we live by the Spirit, gentleness is expressed as a part of our new nature and it shapes the way we interact with others.

2. Contrast to Worldly Behavior:

Many of the verses above (*exempli gratia*, Ephesians 4:2, 1 Timothy 6:11, Titus 3:2) call for gentleness as the opposite of harshness, pride, and bitterness. The world often values assertiveness, self-promotion, and even aggression, the fruit of gentleness stands in contrast, showing the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Gentleness is not weakness but strength under control, modeled by Christ (Matthew 11:29). It is an intentional choice to be calm, compassionate, and

humble, even when confronted with difficult circumstances or people.

3. Gentleness in Our Relationships:

Galatians 5:23 speaks of gentleness in the context of “fruit”—it is something that grows over time as we yield to the Spirit. This is in alignment with the passages above, such as Titus 3:2 and James 3:17, where gentleness is seen in our interactions with others. Whether it’s responding to criticism (Proverbs 15:1), gently instructing those who oppose us (2 Timothy 2:25), or patiently bearing with one another (Ephesians 4:2), gentleness is foundational to healthy, godly relationships.

4. Gentleness Reflects God’s Character:

Just as gentleness is an intrinsic part of who God is (Philippians 4:5, where we are reminded of God’s nearness), the fruit of gentleness in believers demonstrates that we are being conformed to the image of Christ. The Holy Spirit shapes us to be more like Him—gentle in spirit, gentle in action.

Gentle Like Jesus- Conformed to the Image of the Son

1. Romans 8:29

“For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”

- This verse directly states that God’s purpose for believers is to be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. This is a fundamental aspect of our salvation and sanctification—God’s desire is for us to reflect the character and nature of Christ.

2. 2 Corinthians 3:18

“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

- Here, Paul describes the ongoing transformation of believers into the image of Christ. This is not an instantaneous change but a progressive transformation that occurs as we behold God’s glory. It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we are gradually made more like Christ.

3. Colossians 3:10

“And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

- In Colossians, Paul speaks of the “new self” that believers put on when they are saved. This new identity is being renewed and transformed to resemble the image of God, which ultimately points to Christ as the perfect image of the invisible God (see Colossians 1:15).

4. Philippians 3:20-21

“But our citizenship is in Heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.”

- This passage points to the future glorification of believers. At that time, our bodies will be transformed to be like His glorious body, fully reflecting His image in both spirit and physical form.

5. 1 John 3:2

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see him as He is.”

- This verse expresses the hope of believers that we will be fully conformed to His image. The transformation will be complete, as we will see Christ as He is and be made like Him.

The Biblical vision of gentleness is not about being passive or weak but about demonstrating strength through humility, patience, and self-control. It's the ability to handle situations with care and compassion, reflecting Christ's character in our lives. As we grow in the Spirit, gentleness becomes a natural fruit, helping us to navigate our relationships and situations with grace and wisdom. Gentleness is a sign that the Spirit is at work in us, cultivating godly character that leads to peace, unity, and love.

9. 1 Peter 3:4

“Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.”

In 1 Peter 3:4, Peter is speaking to women (though the principle applies to all believers) about the kind of beauty that is truly valuable in God's eyes. He contrasts outward adornment—such as braided hair, jewelry, and fine clothes—with the beauty of a “gentle and quiet spirit”. This spirit reflects “humility, peace, and self-control” rather than self-promotion or external displays of wealth or status.

- Gentleness in this context means a humble and peaceful demeanor that trusts in God's sovereignty, rather than striving to gain attention through external means. It's the kind of spirit that is not anxious, combative, or demanding, but instead one that rests in God's grace and mercy.

- For us as believers, this verse calls us to cultivate an inner beauty that reflects Christ, characterized by "gentleness and quietness". It's an invitation to value the transformation of the heart over outward appearances. When we cultivate gentleness, we embrace a Christ-like humility that places trust in God's provision and timing, rather than seeking to manipulate circumstances or impress others.

10. 1 Peter 3:15

"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

In 1 Peter 3:15, Peter encourages believers to always be prepared to defend their faith and explain the hope they have in Christ, especially when they face persecution or questioning from outsiders. However, he emphasizes that when we share our hope, it must be done with "gentleness" and "respect".

- Gentleness in this context is not about being passive or timid in our defense of the faith, but about being respectful and patient, even when confronted with hostility or misunderstanding. It means speaking the truth in love and demonstrating a Christlike attitude, rather than being harsh, defensive, or argumentative.

- In our lives, this principle applies whenever we are called to share the Gospel or explain our faith. Whether we're speaking with a skeptical friend, a coworker, or even someone who opposes Christianity, our response should always be gentle. Gentleness doesn't mean watering down the truth, but conveying it with humility and love, understanding that everyone is at a different point in their spiritual journey.

How Christ Was Gentle

Christ's gentleness is one of His most profound attributes, and it is beautifully revealed throughout the Gospels. His gentleness was expressed in His interactions with people, in how He treated those in need, and in how He responded to opposition or suffering. Here are some key ways Christ demonstrated gentleness:

1. Gentleness in His Relationships with People:

Matthew 11:28-30:

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

- Jesus invites the weary and burdened to find rest in Him, offering a relationship marked by gentleness. Jesus carries our burdens. He is compassionate and understanding, offering peace to those struggling under the weight of life's difficulties.

John 8:1-11 (The Woman Caught in Adultery):

- When the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery before Jesus, they sought to trap Him. Instead of responding harshly or condemning her, He

gently addressed her accusers, saying, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Then, He spoke to the woman with tenderness: "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."

- Here, Jesus shows gentleness in His interaction with someone caught in sin, offering both truth (calling her to leave her life of sin) and grace (not condemning her). His gentleness brings healing rather than condemnation.

2. Gentleness in His Leadership:

Mark 10:13-16 (Jesus and the Children):

- Jesus demonstrated His gentleness when parents brought their children to Him to be blessed. The disciples rebuked them, but Jesus responded by saying, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

- Rather than dismissing the children, Jesus embraced them, showing His tenderness and care for the most vulnerable members of society. His gentle leadership shows that the Kingdom of God is open to all, no matter their status or age.

Matthew 12:18-20 (Isaiah 42:1-3 Prophecy)

"Here is My servant whom I have chosen, the One I love, in whom I delight; I will put My Spirit on Him, and He will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out, till He has brought justice through to victory."

- This prophecy about Jesus reflects His gentle nature. His mission is one of restoration, not destruction. His gentleness is seen in how He treated the broken, the wounded, and the marginalized.

3. Gentleness in His Suffering and Sacrifice:

Matthew 26:52-54 (Jesus Arrested in Gethsemane):

- When Peter tried to defend Jesus by drawing a sword, Jesus said, "Put your sword back in its place. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"

- Jesus was fully aware of His power and could have called upon divine retribution, yet He chose to bear the cross with gentleness and humility. His gentleness is evident in His willingness to submit to the Father's will, even when it led to His suffering and death.

Isaiah 53:7: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth."

- Jesus' response to suffering and injustice was marked by quiet strength and gentleness. He did not retaliate or defend Himself, but He endured suffering for the sake of the world. This is the ultimate expression of gentleness—strength under control, choosing the way of sacrifice and love.

How Christ Bears the Fruit of Gentleness in Our Lives

As believers, we are called to conform to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29), which means His gentleness is part of our new nature. The Holy Spirit works in us to produce the fruit of gentleness, which reflects Christ's character. The old you might have been rough, harsh, rude, and aggressive but the new you in Christ is gentle.

1. The Holy Spirit Cultivates Gentleness in Us:

- The Holy Spirit works in the heart of the believer, shaping our character to be more like Christ (Galatians 5:22-23). As we yield to the Spirit, we become more patient, humble, and gentle in our responses to others.

- Philippians 2:5-8 encourages us to have the same mindset as Christ, who humbled Himself, taking on the nature of a servant. This is possible because we have been given the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16).

2. Jesus Teaches Us How to Be Gentle:

- Matthew 11:29: "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

- Jesus not only modeled gentleness in His life, but He also calls us to learn from Him. As we spend time with Him in prayer, and study of His Word, we grow in gentleness. We are to take His yoke upon us—submitting to His leadership and allowing Him to guide us. The more time we spend with Jesus, the more His gentleness becomes evident in our lives.

3. Gentleness in Our Relationships:

- Ephesians 4:2: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

- Christ's gentleness is expressed in how He treats others, and we are called to follow His example in our relationships with one another. This means being slow to anger, offering compassion to those in need, and showing humility in our interactions.

- Colossians 3:12-13: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

- Christ's gentleness empowers us to be gentle with others. As we experience His gentleness and forgiveness, we are better able to extend those same qualities to others, especially when they wrong us. Gentleness, empowered by Christ's own example and through the Holy Spirit, helps us navigate even the most challenging relationships.

4. Gentleness in Our Response to Trials:

- 2 Corinthians 10:1: "By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you..."

- Paul appeals to the Corinthians through the gentleness and humility of Christ, showing that even in the face of conflict, correction, and trial, we are to embody Christ's gentle spirit. Jesus' gentleness teaches us to endure difficulties with a calm trust in God's sovereignty and grace.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, Christ bears the fruit of gentleness in our lives. As we grow in our relationship with Him, learn from His example, and yield to the Spirit, His gentleness begins to shape our attitudes and actions. We become more patient, compassionate, and humble, reflecting Christ's character to a world in desperate need of His love and grace.

Genuine Gentleness

"If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them" (Luke 6:29).

"If someone slaps you on one cheek..." In this context, a slap to the cheek is not about physical harm, but about insult and degradation. In Jewish culture, a slap on the cheek was the most demeaning gesture possible—a deliberate act of disrespect. It was used as a public rejection, often by synagogue leaders, to expel people from the community, especially Jewish converts to Christianity. It was a clear sign of scorn and humiliation.

When Jesus instructs us to "turn the other cheek," He is not advocating for passivity in the face of violence, but rather teaching us how to respond when we are insulted. Rather than responding with insults or vengeance, we are called to break the cycle of aggression with grace. This is beautifully captured in 1 Peter 2:23, where it says, "When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate." Jesus set this example Himself—choosing not to answer back in anger or hatred. As Peter later writes in 1 Peter 3:9, "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult." Instead, we are to respond to harm with kindness,

showing the world a different way of dealing with offense—through grace and humility. This is where the fruit of gentleness begins to take root.

“If someone takes your coat, give him the shirt off your back also.” In the time of Roman rule, most Jews lived in poverty, owning very little. Yet, there was one thing nearly everyone had—a cloak. The cloak was vital: it kept them warm in the cold, shielded them from the sun in the heat, and served as a blanket or pillow at night. It was so essential that in Exodus 22:26, God commands that if someone takes another person’s cloak as collateral, it must be returned by evening, so the person can have something to sleep with.

Yet Jesus goes beyond the Law. He doesn’t just ask for the bare minimum. When He says, “If someone takes your cloak, give him your tunic as well,” He is calling us to a radical generosity that transcends mere obligation. He invites us to go further than what is expected, to demonstrate love and selflessness that astonishes the world. In doing so, we show the fruit of gentleness—the willingness to lay down our own rights, comfort, and possessions for the sake of another.

Gentleness is not weakness. It is strength under control, the ability to hold back when the world expects a reaction, and instead offer kindness and grace. It is about responding to life’s injustices with a heart of mercy, a heart that seeks to restore and reconcile, not to retaliate or escalate. Jesus modeled this gentleness perfectly, and His call to us is clear: when we are insulted, we don’t respond with insults; when we are wronged, we don’t retaliate; when we are taken advantage of, we give more than is asked.

This is the heart of gentleness—the willingness to surrender our rights and respond with love, even in the face of insult or loss. It is a fruit that reflects the very character of Christ. And as we cultivate this fruit in our own lives, we reflect His love to a world that desperately needs to see what true strength in gentleness looks like.

Chapter 9

Gentleness (praiótēs) - Strength Under Control Small Group Questions

1. How does the concept of gentleness differ from the world's idea of strength? Reflecting on verses like Matthew 11:29 and Philippians 4:5, how do we reconcile the gentleness of Jesus with the common understanding of strength in today's culture, which often values assertiveness, aggression, or control? How can we embody gentleness as strength under control, as demonstrated by Christ?

2. In moments of stress or conflict, how does prayer help us shift from worry to gentleness? Philippians 4:6 encourages us to replace anxiety with prayer and thanksgiving. How does prayer help us not only hand over our burdens to God but also transform our reactions to others? Can you think of a recent situation where prayer led you to respond with gentleness instead of frustration or anger?

3. What role does gentleness play in our relationships with others, especially in times of disagreement or correction?

Considering passages like 2 Timothy 2:25 and James 3:17, how can we practice gentleness in situations where we need to correct someone or defend our faith? What does it look like to combine truth with gentleness, especially when faced with opposition or misunderstanding?

4. How does Jesus' response to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) teach us about balancing truth and gentleness in our interactions with others?

Jesus extended grace to the woman by not condemning her, but He also called her to leave her life of sin. How can we, as followers of Christ, reflect this balance of truth and gentleness when we encounter people in sin or those we disagree with?

What challenges might we face in embodying both qualities?

5. What does it look like for us to “learn from Jesus” and embrace His gentle and humble heart (Matthew 11:28-30) in our daily relationships and responses to conflict?

Jesus invites us to take His yoke upon us, promising rest for our souls. How does yielding to His leadership in moments of stress or conflict help us embody gentleness? In what areas of life do you find it most difficult to respond with gentleness, and how can you apply His example to those situations?

Chapter 10
Self-Control (enkráteia) – Living Authentically:
Embracing Your Identity in Christ



Paul's choice to begin the Fruit of the Spirit list with love and end it with self-control is deeply intentional and reflects the theological and practical significance of both virtues within the Christian life.

Love as the Foundation of the Fruits

Paul starts the Fruit of the Spirit list with love because it is the foundational fruit that all the other virtues flow from. In Scripture, love is seen as the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37-39), and Jesus Himself defined love as the hallmark of His followers (John 13:34-35). In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul elevates love as the highest virtue, saying that without love, all other actions and gifts are meaningless (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Love is central to the Christian life because it reflects God's nature. "God is love" (1 John 4:8), and as believers, we are called to reflect that love in our relationships with God and others.

By starting with love, Paul is emphasizing that all the other Fruits of the Spirit are expressions of this love.

For example:

- Joy springs from the love of God.
- Peace is maintained through the love we experience and extend.
- Kindness, goodness, and faithfulness all grow from the soil of love.
- Patience reflects the enduring nature of love in our interactions with others.
- Gentleness demonstrates love's compassion and understanding.

- Self-control is empowered by love, guiding us to make wise choices.

In essence, if our hearts are filled with God's love, all the other fruits naturally follow and are empowered by that love.

Self-Control as the Culmination

Paul ends the Fruit of the Spirit list with self-control because it is the virtue that helps believers govern their actions, thoughts, and desires in alignment with the other Fruit of the Spirit. While love may be the source, self-control is often the exercise of the will that brings those virtues to fruition in daily life.

Self-control "enkrátēia": self-control, and temperance⁵⁶ is about the ability to restrain our impulses (fleshly desires) and choose the way of the Spirit over the desires of the flesh. "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). Paul often contrasts living by the Spirit with the works of the flesh, and self-control is key in this battle. Without self-control, the other virtues can become distorted or diminished. For example:

- Without self-control, love could become selfish or conditional.
- Without self-control, joy could be overshadowed by fleeting pleasures or discouragement.
- Without self-control, peace could give way to anxious reactions or impulsive decisions.
- Without self-control, patience might deteriorate into frustration or irritability in challenging situations.

⁵⁶www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1466/kjv/tr/0-1/

- Without self-control, kindness could turn into indulgence or weakness in confronting wrong behavior.
- Without self-control, goodness could become complacency, neglecting to stand for what is right.
- Without self-control, faithfulness might waver under pressure or lead to untrustworthiness.
- Without self-control, gentleness could be perceived as weakness, failing to assert when necessary.
- Without self-control, self-control itself could spiral into overindulgence or a lack of discipline, undermining its own purpose.

In Galatians 5:16-17, Paul talks about the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, and self-control is the virtue that enables believers to walk in the Spirit, resisting the fleshly desires. Self-control is not just about willpower, but about being led by the Spirit to make choices that honor God and reflect His character. It's the practical expression of spiritual maturity—the final piece that ensures a believer's life fully reflects Christlikeness.

Love is the great commandment and the source of all Christian behavior, while self-control is the practical way to live out that love and bring it to completion.

Love, as the beginning, sets the intention, while self-control at the end helps keep the believer focused, disciplined, and steadfast in the pursuit of godliness.

Practical Implications for Christian Living

Love allows believers to focus outwardly on God and others, seeking their good.

Self-control brings the Christian life inwardly under control, helping the believer avoid distractions, sinful patterns, and things that hinder spiritual growth.

The fruit of self-control is not something we can simply “manufacture” on our own, because true self-control is a work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, not a result of human effort alone. Galatians 5:23, where self-control is listed as a Fruit of the Spirit, teaches us that self-control is a natural outgrowth of the Holy Spirit’s presence and work in us. It’s part of the transforming power of Christ in our lives. Anything that is listed as a “Fruit” in Galatians 5:22-23 is what the life of Christ produces in us. We know this to be true because the Greek word for “fruit” (karpós) means that which originates or comes from something.⁵⁷ None of the fruit that is listed, self-control included, originate from us but flow out of us from the work of the Holy Spirit and is a direct result of our union life with Christ.

Self-control is a Fruit and it is not Something We Manufacture

1. It’s a Work of the Spirit, Not the Flesh

- The Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) contrasts with the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21), which include behaviors like indulgence, uncontrolled desires, and immorality. Self-control “enkrátēia” is the opposite of this. It’s not about white-knuckling our way through a situation; it’s about the Holy Spirit working in us to bring about His will, shaping our desires and actions.

⁵⁷www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2590/niv/mgnt/0-1/

Galatians 5:16-17: "So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh."

- Self-control is only possible when we are walking by the Spirit, allowing the Spirit to direct our lives rather than relying on our strength to battle the desires of the flesh.

2. It's a Sign of Christ's Indwelling Presence:

- Christ in us, through the Holy Spirit, enables us to resist temptation and live in a way that reflects His character. Just as Christ Himself demonstrated perfect self-control, especially in the face of suffering, His example and His presence in us empower us to do the same.

Philippians 4:13: "I can do all this through Him who gives me strength."

- Self-control is not about our strength or willpower. It's about yielding to the power of Christ in us. We rely on His strength to help us make choices that reflect His holiness, even when we are tempted or under pressure.

3. It's Part of the Transformation of Our Nature:

- Christ's goal for us is not simply to behave better but to be transformed into His image. This transformation is a process in which the Holy Spirit makes us more like Christ, and self-control is part of that process.

Romans 8:29: "For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son."

- As we grow in Christ, we become more like Him, and His self-control becomes our self-control. It's the

same principle as with other aspects of the Fruit of the Spirit where Christ's nature is formed in us.

4. It's a Response to God's Grace:

- We don't muster self-control because we're trying to earn God's favor, but because God's grace in us compels us. The more we experience His grace, the more we are able to say "no" to the sinful desires that used to control us.

Titus 2:11-12: "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age."

- God's grace teaches us to live with self-control. It's not a burden or a demand; it's a response to His love and mercy.

5. It's Developed Over Time:

- The Fruit of the Spirit is something that grows over time. It's not instant; it's cultivated as we continually yield to the Holy Spirit. As we trust God, rely on His strength, and cooperate with His work in us, we begin to experience increased self-control. But it's always His work, not ours.

2 Peter 1:5-6: "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness."

- While we actively participate in the process (by yielding to the Spirit, learning from the Word, and cooperating with God's work), it's the Spirit who brings about the growth in self-control.

6. It's Evidence of the New Life in Christ:

- True self-control reflects the new life that we have in Christ. It's evidence that we are living by the Spirit and not by the flesh. It's not about perfect performance, but about a continual transformation that shows we are becoming more like Christ.

Galatians 5:24: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

- Self-control flows from the crucified life—living in the reality that our old self, with all its sinful desires, has been put to death in Christ. Now, we are free to live by the Spirit, and self-control is a natural result.

New Testament Verses Using "Enkráteia" (Self-Control):

1. 1 Corinthians 7:9: "But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion."

2. Galatians 5:23: "Gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

3. Titus 1:8: "Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined."

4. Titus 2:2: "Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance."

5. Titus 2:5: "To be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the Word of God."

6. 2 Peter 1:6: “And to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness.”

7. 2 Timothy 1:7: “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”

Though “enkráteia” is not used in 2 Timothy 1:7, “sōphronismos” is considered a related term also meaning “self-control,” “moderation” or “sound mind”.⁵⁸

Embracing Our Identity as Beloved Children of God and the Fruit of Self-Control

As believers, our identity is rooted in the profound truth that we are beloved children of God. This identity is not something we earn through performance or behavior but is a gift we receive by grace through faith in Christ. Understanding and embracing this truth transforms the way we live, think, and interact with the world. One of the key aspects of living out this identity is the Fruit of the Spirit, particularly the fruit of self-control.

Self-control may seem like something we must achieve through sheer effort, but when we grasp the truth of who we are in Christ—“beloved children of God”—it changes how we approach this virtue. Self-control is not just a matter of trying harder to restrain our impulses, but rather a natural outflow of our new identity in Christ and the Holy Spirit’s work in us.

1. The Foundation of Our Identity: Beloved Children of God

⁵⁸www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4995/niv/mgnt/0-1/

At the core of the Christian faith is the astounding truth that we are loved by God—not because of what we do, but because of who we are in Christ. Through His life, death, and Resurrection, Jesus has made a way for us to be adopted into God’s family (Romans 8:15), and this adoption is grounded in love (1 John 3:1). This identity of being God’s child is transformative because it assures us that we are secure in His love. No matter what happens, we belong to Him. When we fully embrace this truth, it begins to reshape our hearts, minds, and actions. We no longer live from a place of insecurity, striving to prove our worth, but from a place of belovedness, knowing we are deeply loved by the Father.

2. Self-Control as a Response to Our Identity in Christ

The fruit of self-control (Galatians 5:23) is one of the virtues that the Holy Spirit cultivates in our lives as we grow in Christ. But what does it mean for self-control to flow from our identity as God’s beloved children?

First, we must understand that self-control is not about self-reliance or willpower alone; it’s about empowerment through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who lives within us, enables us to live in a way that reflects the heart of God. Self-control, as a Fruit of the Spirit, is a sign that we are living in alignment with God’s will, not just responding to external circumstances or our impulses.

As beloved children of God, we are given the freedom to choose, not based on our fleeting desires or human inclinations, but based on our new nature in Christ. We are no longer enslaved to sin or driven by our selfish urges (Romans 6:6-7). Instead, we are empowered to make choices that honor God, reflect His character, and align with our new identity.

3. The Link Between Love and Self-Control

When we embrace our identity as God's beloved children, we begin to see that self-control is fundamentally an expression of love. The Apostle Paul explains this beautifully in 1 Corinthians 13, where love is described not as self-seeking, but as patient, kind, and not easily angered. To exercise self-control is to express a Christ-like love—for ourselves, others, and God.

For example, when we are tempted to respond with anger or frustration, the Holy Spirit empowers us to choose patience and kindness, demonstrating the love of God rather than reacting out of our impulses. Self-control becomes a way of choosing love over the immediate gratification of the flesh. It reflects our deeper commitment to living in a way that honors God's love for us and extends that love to those around us.

4. Self-Control as Evidence of Our New Nature

In Christ, we have been given a new nature—we are no longer bound by the sinful desires that once controlled us (2 Corinthians 5:17). As beloved children, our new identity comes with a new way of living. The fruit of self-control is evidence that our identity in Christ is being lived out in practical ways. We are not living for ourselves, but for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Self-control is also a form of spiritual maturity. It reflects a heart that is submitted to God and trusts that His way is better than the fleeting pleasures of sin. It is choosing to live in the light of God's love, rather than being driven by momentary desires that lead to regret. As we grow in understanding of our identity as beloved children of God, we begin to

naturally embody more self-control because we are more aligned with God's will, His purposes, and His heart.

5. Living Out Our Beloved Identity in Everyday Life

When we embrace our identity as God's beloved children, we also recognize that self-control is an essential part of living out that identity in the world. It's in the everyday choices—the words we speak, the decisions we make in moments of temptation, how we respond to difficult situations—that our identity is lived out and seen by the world.

- “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us” (1 Peter 2:12).
 - “So that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the Word of Life” (Philippians 2:15-16).
 - “In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness, and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us” (Titus 2:7-8).
- When we resist the urge to lash out in anger, we reflect the gentleness and self-control of Christ.
- When we choose patience over impatience, we demonstrate the love that comes from knowing we are secure in God's love.

- When we turn away from indulgence in worldly things, we are honoring the fact that we are not slaves to our desires, but free in Christ to choose what is good and holy.

These moments, while small, are powerful demonstrations of who we are in Christ. They are signs that we are being transformed into His image (Romans 8:29) and that our identity as beloved children of God is shaping the way we live in the world.

How Self-Control Aligns with Our Purpose and Values

Having established that self-control is rooted in our identity as beloved children of God, it is important to understand how this virtue directly connects to the purpose and values we are called to live out as followers of Christ. Our identity in Christ not only informs how we see ourselves but also shapes the way we live and the goals we pursue.

As we embrace our new identity, we begin to align our actions—especially our choices and behaviors—with the purpose God has designed for us. Ephesians 2:10: “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Self-control, empowered by the Holy Spirit, becomes an essential tool in living out that purpose and reflecting the values of the Kingdom of God in every area of our lives.

1. Self-Control as a Reflection of God’s Purpose for Us

God has a specific purpose for each of His children (Ephesians 2:10). This purpose includes living out His love, advancing His Kingdom, and becoming more like Christ. Self-control is a key component in fulfilling this

purpose because it enables us to make decisions that are consistent with God's will, rather than reacting impulsively according to our desires or the pressures of the world.

When we exhibit self-control, we choose to align ourselves with God's higher purposes instead of being distracted by the fleeting pleasures or distractions that would lead us away from His calling. It's in the moments when we choose patience over impulsivity, restraint over indulgence, or humility over pride that we reflect the heart of God and demonstrate that we are living intentionally to fulfill His purpose.

This aligns with the greater mission of the believer: to glorify God in our lives. As we cultivate self-control, we can more faithfully steward the time, talents, and opportunities God has given us to serve others and advance His Kingdom.

2. Self-Control and Our Christian Values

The Christian life is centered around values that are often counter to the world's values: love over hate, humility over pride, patience over impulsiveness, and sacrifice over self-centeredness. Self-control is the practical expression of these Kingdom values in our everyday lives. By practicing self-control, we uphold the values that reflect God's character and make the Gospel visible to the world.

Kingdom of God vs. Kingdom of the World

Kingdom of God	Kingdom of the World	Scripture References
Characterized by humility and servanthood	Characterized by pride and self-promotion	<i>Matthew 20:26-28</i> — "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant... just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..."
Strength is shown in weakness	Strength is shown in power and dominance	<i>2 Corinthians 12:9-10</i> — "But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses..."
Focus on eternal rewards	Focus on temporal, material success	<i>Matthew 6:19-21</i> — "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth... but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven..."
It values selflessness	It values self-interest	<i>Philippians 2:3-4</i> — "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests..."
Involves suffering and sacrifice for others	Seeks comfort, pleasure, and avoidance of pain	<i>Matthew 16:24</i> — "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."
It promotes peace and reconciliation	It fosters conflict and division	<i>Matthew 5:9</i> — "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."
Righteousness and justice are its foundation	Injustice and corruption often prevail	<i>Isaiah 9:7</i> — "Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice..."
It values the poor and marginalized	It tends to neglect or oppress the poor	<i>Luke 6:20</i> — "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."
Love and forgiveness are central	Anger and revenge are often justified	<i>Matthew 5:44</i> — "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."
It operates by grace	It operates by merit and works	<i>Ephesians 2:8-9</i> — "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."
It is a kingdom of light and truth	It is a kingdom of darkness and lies	<i>John 8:12</i> — "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"
It is marked by joy in the Holy Spirit	It is marked by temporary happiness or despair	<i>Romans 14:17</i> — "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."
The greatest is the one who serves	The greatest is the one who rules over others	<i>Mark 9:35</i> — "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."
It is a kingdom of faith and trust in God	It is a kingdom of self-reliance and control	<i>Matthew 6:25-34</i> — "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life... but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."
It brings reconciliation with God	It is often in rebellion against God	<i>Romans 5:10</i> — "For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son..."
It brings freedom	It leads to slavery to sin	<i>John 8:36</i> — "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."
It is a kingdom of peace with God	It is a kingdom of conflict with God	<i>Romans 5:1</i> — "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

3. Self-Control as a Tool for Living Out Our Kingdom Purpose

Our ultimate purpose as believers is to be ambassadors of Christ—to reflect His image, live according to His Kingdom principles, and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). Self-control directly supports this mission by helping us:

- Focus on eternal things rather than temporary distractions, ensuring that our lives are marked by purpose rather than passing pleasures.
- Steward resources well, whether our time, money, or relationships so that everything we do contributes to advancing God’s Kingdom rather than serving selfish interests.
- Demonstrate godliness in our relationships, actions, and words. Our world often prizes self-indulgence, but self-control reveals the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

In this way, self-control is not simply about limiting negative behavior; it is also about choosing the best path—the path that aligns with God’s eternal purposes and His call to live lives that reflect His glory.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

4. Self-Control and Living Out Our Values in a Distracted World

In our current cultural moment, it’s easy to get swept up in distractions—whether they stem from media, societal pressures, or the pursuit of success and comfort. Practicing self-control amid a distraction-filled

world helps us stay grounded in our Christian values and purpose. It's through self-control that we resist temptation, refuse to give in to the allure of immediate gratification, and remain faithful to God's call.

Living a life of self-control is a powerful testimony to the world that our values are different because our hearts have been captured by a higher calling. The more we embrace our identity as beloved children of God, the more we are empowered to live lives that reflect our purpose and align with the eternal values of God's Kingdom.

Tips for Cultivating Self-Control in Various Aspects of Life

Cultivating self-control is a lifelong journey that requires intentional effort, reliance on the Holy Spirit, and the transformation of our hearts and minds. While self-control is a Fruit of the Spirit, we also have an active role in practicing and developing it in various areas of our lives. Here are some practical tips for cultivating self-control in different aspects:

1. Self-Control in Thoughts (Renew Your Mind):

In Romans 12:2, Paul urges believers to be transformed by the renewal of their minds. This is the foundation of self-control in our thinking. By regularly meditating on Scripture and filling our minds with God's truth, we begin to think in ways that honor Him.

- Take Every Thought Captive: 2 Corinthians 10:5 encourages us to "take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ." When negative, sinful, or unproductive thoughts arise, we can choose to reject them and replace them with thoughts that align with God's Word.

In 2 Corinthians 10:5, the Word of God instructs us to “Destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” To take a thought captive means to identify and conquer it by comparing it to God’s Word. We ask ourselves: Does this thought align with God’s promises for my life? If not, we reject its influence and replace it with one of God’s promises from Scripture.

In 2 Peter 1:3-4, the Bible reassures us that “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His precious and magnificent promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, now that you have escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

God’s precious promises enable us to partake in His divine nature. As our thoughts are renewed, new beliefs are birthed, and we become better aligned with God’s plan for our lives. Intentionally altering our thought patterns to harmonize with God’s Word sparks the creation of new neural connections, making this alignment increasingly strengthened over time. Through neuroplasticity, our brains can be reshaped to reflect the truth of God’s Word. Proverbs 23:7 reminds us: “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Our thoughts, shape our beliefs and actions, and define the limits of our lives. To embrace the abundant life promised by Jesus, we must purposefully engage in the renewal of our minds, there is no other way.”⁵⁹

⁵⁹Dr. Matthew Webster. How to Renew Your Mind and Receive Total Well-Being of Body, Mind, and Spirit. Kindle Direct Publishing. 2025. Pages 13-14.

- Practice Mindfulness and Awareness: Being aware of your thoughts throughout the day helps you identify when your mind drifts toward negativity, worry, or temptation. Acknowledging these moments allows you to redirect your thoughts toward peace, truth, and gratitude (Philippians 4:8).

2. Self-Control in Emotions:

- Pause and Reflect: When you feel anger, frustration, or other strong emotions rising, take a moment to pause. Instead of reacting immediately, step back and reflect on the situation from a calm perspective. Proverbs 14:29 reminds us that "whoever is patient has great understanding."

- Practice Empathy: In emotionally charged situations, practice empathy. Try to understand where others are coming from, even when it's difficult. This helps keep your emotions in check and prevents rash responses.

- Pray for God's Help: When emotions feel overwhelming, turn to God in prayer. Ask for His strength to control your emotions and respond with kindness, grace, and patience. Psalm 141:3 says, "Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips."

3. Self-Control in Relationships:

- Be Slow to Speak: James 1:19 teaches us to be "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry." Practicing self-control in our speech is key to healthy relationships. Pause before responding to avoid reacting in anger or frustration.

- Seek Peace, Not Conflict: In moments of disagreement, make it your goal to seek peace rather

than to “win” the argument. Ephesians 4:2-3 says to “be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Strive to handle conflict with humility and grace.

- Extend Grace: Self-control in relationships means holding back from harsh judgment or condemnation. Instead, respond with grace, just as God has shown grace to us (Colossians 3:13).

4. Self-Control in Actions and Habits:

- Establish Boundaries: Setting healthy boundaries is essential for practicing self-control. Whether it’s in your time, finances, or relationships, having clear boundaries helps prevent overcommitment and ensures you stay aligned with your values. Proverbs 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”

- Start Small: Begin by practicing self-control in small, everyday decisions. Whether it’s saying “no” to a tempting unhealthy snack or choosing to go for a walk instead of sitting on the couch, these small choices build the muscle of self-control over time.

- Create Accountability: Surround yourself with people who will help you grow in your faith. Proverbs 27:17 reminds us, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

5. Self-Control in Spiritual Disciplines:

- Commit to Regular Prayer and Bible Study: Developing self-control in our spiritual lives starts with consistent time in prayer and reading the Word. These practices strengthen our inner resolve and align our hearts with God’s will (Psalm 119:11).

- Fast for Focus: Fasting is an ancient spiritual discipline that helps us practice self-control and focus on God. Whether it's fasting from food, social media, or something else, fasting helps train us to say "no" to our flesh and "yes" to God (Matthew 6:16-18).

- Practice Sabbath Rest: Sometimes, the best way to practice self-control is to rest. Observing a Sabbath—taking time to stop working and refocus on God—is a way of surrendering control and trusting God with the results. Exodus 20:8-10 encourages us to "remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy." The writer of Hebrews interprets the Sabbath rest as a spiritual rest that is found in Christ, pointing to a deeper rest that believers experience when they enter into a relationship with God through faith.

"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from His" (Hebrews 4:9-10).

6. Self-Control in Times of Temptation:

1 Corinthians 10:13 assures us that God provides a way out of temptation. When you face temptations, take immediate action by physically removing yourself from the situation if possible. Avoid situations that you know will test your self-control.

- Use Scripture as Your Weapon: Jesus resisted temptation in the wilderness by quoting Scripture (Matthew 4:1-11). When you face temptations, fight back with the truth of God's Word. Having key verses memorized can help you quickly combat the enemy's lies and impulses.

- Lean on the Holy Spirit: Finally, remember that self-control is a Fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians

5:23). When you feel weak, ask the Spirit to give you strength. Surrender to His power and trust that He will empower you to overcome.

Self-control is not about willpower alone; it's about surrendering to the Holy Spirit and letting Him transform us from the inside out. As we cultivate self-control in our thoughts, emotions, relationships, actions, and habits, we align ourselves with the will of God and grow more into the likeness of Christ. It's a continuous process, but with each small victory, we grow stronger and more grounded in our identity as God's beloved children. Let us trust in His power, knowing that He is faithful to help us cultivate the fruit of self-control in our lives for His glory and our good.

As we embrace the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we find ourselves blossoming in ways we never imagined. Each fruit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—serves as a vibrant testament to the abundant life Christ offers us.

The Fruit of the Spirit represents a divine abundance that flows from a deep relationship with God. Just as a healthy tree yields a bountiful harvest, our lives can produce an overflow of love, joy, peace, and all the other fruits when we remain rooted in Christ. This spiritual journey of ours is not merely about personal growth; it is about reflecting God's glory to the world around us. Let us step boldly into the life God has prepared for us, filled with the Holy Spirit's guidance and fueled by the promise of His presence. Together, our life's gardens will draw others to the richness of God's grace, illuminating the path to abundant and everlasting life.

Chapter 10

Self-Control (enkrátēia) – Living Authentically: Embracing Your Identity in Christ Small Group Questions

1. How does our identity as “beloved children of God” shape the way we approach self-control?

Consider how understanding that we are loved and accepted by God can transform our motivations for practicing self-control. Share an example where your identity in Christ helped you make a difficult decision or exercise self-control.

2. In what ways does self-control reflect the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

Self-control is listed as a fruit of the Spirit, but how is it different from relying on sheer willpower or self-discipline? How can we cultivate self-control in our daily lives through yielding to the Holy Spirit?

3. How do the first and last Fruits of the Spirit—love and self-control—work together in our Christian walk?

Paul begins the list of the fruits of the Spirit with love and ends with self-control. How do these two virtues complement each other in the Christian life? Reflect on how love enables us to practice self-control, and how self-control ensures that love remains pure and unselfish. Can you think of a situation where both love and self-control were needed to honor God in a relationship or decision?

4. How can we practically practice self-control as an expression of love in moments when we feel tempted to react out of frustration, anger, or selfishness?
