

“The Fruit of the Spirit” (part 3)

Galatians 5:22-23

On January 23 of this year, thousands of people gathered at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Sydney, Australia, to witness a rare phenomenon. One of the most endangered plants in the world known as the ‘Corpse Flower’ was about to bloom. There are only about 1,000 of these rare plants in existence, and it is one of the world’s largest flowers and can grow more than six feet tall. The flower blooms only once every ten years or so. Now, you would suppose that the larger the flower, the sweeter the fragrance, right? Not necessarily. The reason this flower is called the ‘Corpse Flower’ is due to the fact that it is the world’s stinkiest. It literally smells like rotten flesh when its bloom opens up.

Sadly, that flower is just like a lot of people’s lives. Though they might appear attractive on the outside because of their financial success, or their social status, or material things, or their talent and ability. When you get close to them, they stink. They emit a rotten attitude. Their stench makes you want to get as far away from them as you possibly can. The fruit of the Spirit, however, has an incredible drawing power. Such fruit is attractive, sweet, and inviting. With that in mind, take your copy of God’s Word and be finding your place in the fifth chapter of Galatians. We’ve been studying what the Bible has to say about the fruit of the Spirit, which are the nine character traits mentioned by the apostle Paul in these verses. The ‘fruit’ of the Spirit is the character of the Lord Jesus that is being produced in the Christian by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives on the inside. And it is the will of God for every believer that we increase and abound in these virtues, so that the branches of our lives be weighed down with the fruit of the Spirit.

I suppose that no matter where you go in the world, there are certain fruits that are characteristic of the geography and culture of that place. For instance, the bananas that we can pick up from the grocery store are more than likely imported from central and South America. When I was in southeast Asia several years ago, I looked forward to tasty passion fruit each morning for breakfast. Georgia is known for its peaches, Florida

is known for its oranges. Dates are a staple throughout the Middle East and they are harvested from the date palm tree. What is interesting is that the date trees don't start producing their fruit until they are about 8 years old, and they are the most productive when they are around 80 years of age. In maturity, they can produce anywhere from 150-300 pounds of dates annually. It is a good illustration of how fruit grows with time. The more mature a person is, the more fruit will be produced in their life. That is, the more we grow and mature in our faith, the more this Christlike character will be on display in us. (Read)

We have already considered the upward fruit of love, joy, and peace. And these virtues are related primarily to our relationship with God. The next three virtues can be called outward fruit because they are concerned with horizontal relationships with other people. The Holy Spirit is at work within us to produce the character of patience, kindness, and goodness. So let's look at these three. First:

1—The priority of PATIENCE (5:22)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is...patience.”

The fruit of patience is something that we're to demonstrate in our relationships with people. I've never met a mom or a dad who didn't need patience while raising kids. Husbands and wives need great patience with each other. Patience is a much needed virtue in our lives, one that the Holy Spirit will produce within us as we are surrendered to His lead.

The Greek word that is used here for 'patience' is really a compound word made up of two words. The first one is 'makro' which means 'slow' and the second is 'thumos' which means 'temper.' So the combined word means to be slow to temper. It is the idea of having a long fuse. Some people have short tempers, which means they easily lose patience and quickly become angry or volatile. There are very few things in life more uncomfortable than being the recipient of someone's temper release. But those who are 'macrothumia' people are long tempered. Which is why some translations use the word 'longsuffering' in verse 22. It is not so much the absence of anger as much as

it is the appropriate handling of anger. The one who has patience is not quick to explode. They don't cave in under pressure. They don't quit when faced with difficulty. Neither do they expect instant results.

Dr. Paul E. Meier — *“Patience is an excellent conscious defense against the frequent minor frustrations of life. Selfish, immature individuals who give themselves too many ‘rights’ are constantly plagued with anger, since so many of their ‘rights’ are violated. Giving up those rights to God and expecting fewer things to be perfect will result in patience, greater humility, less anger, and greater joy in life.”*

Think about how counter-cultural this is, especially in such a results oriented society as ours. Our generation expects instant gratification, and we don't want to have to wait for anything. Access to the internet with our smartphones has made it easier than ever to access information, or binge on entertainment, and purchase products. And it can be done instantly, fostering a culture of immediate gratification. Add to this social media platforms which provide us constant feedback and validation, which only reinforces the idea that everything should be available immediately. Amazon, Door Dash, or Instacart has same day delivery. But character is not something that we can order off of Amazon. There's no amount of likes, hashtags, or filters that can produce within our lives the character of Jesus. Friend, that is something that only the Holy Spirit can do. And one of those traits that He produces is the fruit of patience. Let me mention just a few of the ways in which you and I must cultivate the fruit of patience in our lives. First, we need:

Patience in wrestling with problems

The problems that we encounter in life give us opportunity to learn patience. There is no other way for patience to be learned other than the grind of daily living with all of the challenges it brings. When things don't go according to the plan, we need patience. When others disappoint us or fail to meet some expectation, we need patience. When we face temptation, we need patience. When some persistent health problem won't go away, we need patience. Maybe a cancer that has been in remission has shown signs that it is returning. Patience produced by the Holy Spirit enables us to endure bad days

or some season of hardship. Life's problems call for the fruit of 'macrothumia' in our lives.

James 1:2-4—“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience [endurance]. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

James uses the Old Testament prophets as an example of what this looks like as it is on display in a person. He says:

James 5:10—“As an example of suffering and patience brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the patience of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.”

James says we should consider the patient example of Job who endured in the face of suffering. Think of all this man suffered—losing his possessions, losing his children, even accused by those he thought were his friends. Yet in spite of it all, Job did not sin with his lips. More than likely the problems you are wrestling with are nowhere near as big as what Job faced, but they still require patience. We live under constant pressure, and patience is what we need to get through it. Patience is faith under pressure.

Now, I don't know about you but where I sense my greatest need for patience is in the little frustrations of life. We trust God to give us strength for the monumental problems, but it seems we tend to overlook the nagging little stuff. Most of us have had the experience of heading home after a long day, you are listening to worship music or something, thanking God for a great day. Then all of a sudden, a car pulls out in front of you, or cuts you off. The atmosphere changes in a matter of seconds, and with it so does your attitude. Or, things start breaking down in the house before you can fix them. As soon as you get one thing fixed, there is something else that breaks. On top of that, your children won't stop arguing. The neighbor's dog won't stop barking. Our impatience shows when we least expect it—the school drop off line, or in the parking lot

at Hopewell, trying to find cell service, or trying to find the source of some agitating noise. Little things that wear on us!

Ron Hembree — *“I thought if defeat came at all, it would be a big bold definite joust with a cause or a name. And it came. I had not thought the daily skirmish with a few details, worthwhile: and so I turned my back upon them year on year; until one day a million minutia blanketed together rose up and overwhelmed me.”*

Satan is often like a woodpecker pecking away at us day in and day out, hammering away at the fortress of our mind and heart. Without this longsuffering produced in our lives, we’re a ticking time bomb just waiting to explode. The Holy Spirit teaches us patience through the daily frustrations of life, which added up, can overwhelm you. Yet when they reveal the impatience that lurks within your heart, know that the Spirit uses them for a constructive purpose. We need to be ‘macrothumia’ people when it comes to wrestling with problems. Then notice how we also need:

Patience in working with people

Not only do we need patience when it comes to those problems we wrestle with, but we also need patience when it comes to people. Maybe your problem is with people. It is something that all of us can identify with on some level. Unless you’re a hermit, you’ve got to relate to other people. Patience handles the offenses and injuries that come from other people. ‘Macrothumia’ is the ability to put up with the other people in your life when it is not easy to do so.

- With people in our home

Nothing makes for a godly environment at home like love, joy, peace, and patience. But if you think about, it is easier to lose our patience at home more quickly than anywhere else. The people we love the most are also the ones who are in the bullseye of our impatience. Who we really are is revealed at home, when the garage door is shut and the shades are pulled down. I wonder just how many family problems are exacerbated by impatience? We say things in anger, or do things in a fit of impatient rage.

- With people in our workplace

Whether it is with the public or with a coworker who tries our patience, we need to be men and women of grace. It may be that you work with people who don't know the Lord. They use language that you don't use. They laugh about things that you don't find to be funny. And while it may test your patience to be around them, you've got to learn to see them through the compassionate eyes of Jesus.

- With people in our church

Christians have got to be patient with one another in the family of faith. The people whose personality might not be quite like ours. Who come from different backgrounds and have different preferences. The shepherds must be patient with their sheep, and the sheep must be patient with their shepherds.

- With people in our world

We now live on a planet with just over 8 billion people. And with that many people in the world, we're sure to bump into one another and get on each other's nerves. We need the fruit of patience as we relate to strangers that we meet and interact with every single day. Rather than seeing people as a means to an end, patience sees them as people who need Jesus, people who are loved by God, people who are lost and in need of a Shepherd.

Matthew 9:36—“When He saw the multitudes, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

One of the very best ways to grow in patience with people involves being reminded of God's patience with you. Think about how He has patiently dealt with you in your sins and shortcomings. He still loves you and works with you even though so much in your life is unworthy of Him. This same grace we experienced is now the grace we are to express.

Patience in waiting on promises

A third thing I'll mention about patience involves waiting for promises to be fulfilled. While we're waiting on the Lord in our lives, we need the fruit of patience.

J.I. Packer — *“Wait on the Lord’ is a constant refrain in the Psalms, and it is a necessary word, for God often keeps us waiting. He is not in such a hurry as we are, and it is not His way to give more light on the future than we need for action in the present, or to guide us more than one step at a time. When in doubt, do nothing, but continue to wait on God. When action is needed, light will come.”*

When you're in the waiting room, you can do one of two things—panic or pray. God is never in a hurry!

Many years ago, J. Stuart Holden, one of England's finest preachers, received an invitation to come preach at an important conference. He had purchased his ticket and made his travel arrangements but had to cancel at the last minute because of his wife's health situation. The ship set sail without him, as did the golden opportunity of a lifetime. But he gave himself to caring for his wife while trying not to think about the career opportunity he missed. Sometimes, our complaining about things beyond our control proves that we don't know God like we claim. Delay is often the protective hand of our Father. It was for J. Stuart Holden, who resolved to never again question God's timing. Why? Because the unused ticket he held reserved his passage on a brand new luxury liner—the R.M.S. Titanic. Patience thanks God for the unforeseen detours in life!

2—The potential of KINDNESS (5:22)

“The fruit of the Spirit is...patience, kindness.”

The fifth spiritual virtue that we see mentioned in verse 22 is kindness, which goes a long way in the relationships we have with other people. Mark Twain said, “Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.” Years ago, Steve Sjogren wrote a best-seller that is entitled *Conspiracy of Kindness*. He planted a church in Cincinnati, Ohio, that grew from just five people to more than 7,500 in just fifteen years. In the years he was pastor, he taught his people to demonstrate the kindness of God by offering to do in Jesus' name an act of humble service with no strings attached. Just

random acts of kindness like paying for a stranger's coffee, or writing a 'thank you' note to a shop assistant. In the book, he writes about impact of 'showing God's love in practical ways.' People on the outside were attracted by the sheer undiluted power of God released through 'acts of kindness' that opened up avenues for a verbal witness.

Steve Sjogren — *"While we look high and low for effective approaches that will touch the world around us with God's love, the most obvious one is overlooked. Doing humble acts of service causes the world to notice our lives and to listen to our message."*

Explaining kindness

What is kindness? The word used there for 'kindness' is the Greek word 'chrestotes' which refers to goodness in action or sweetness of disposition. Fruit is sweet, isn't it? There is nothing sweeter than kindness. It is tenderness in dealing with people. It is doing for others what you would want them to do for you. Kindness is the ability to act for the welfare of those who are taxing your patience. It is a way in which the Holy Spirit works to smooth out our rough edges when we are under His control.

Think about how kindness comes from patience. I read a story about a group of people who were traveling by train. It was hot, the trip was long, and everyone was tired. Well, a man was trying to tend to his crying baby. The little one just seemed to cry louder and louder. So one exasperated passenger finally blurted out, "Why don't you take that baby to its mother." With tears in his eyes, the man replied, "I'm sorry, sir. I'm doing my best. I can't take her to her mother. Her mother died this week, her casket is in the baggage car, and we're traveling out of state for the burial." Friend, you don't know what another person has been through in life. They may have had a worse week than you've had. In our impatience and self-centeredness, we are often unkind. But the fruit of the Spirit is kindness. When we're looking for them, kindness opens up doors for ministry.

Experiencing kindness

As believers, we have come to experience the kindness of God, haven't we? God is kind. I think we sometimes get the idea that the Old Testament pictures God only as this stern and vengeful deity. He is just, but He is kind. God says in:

Jeremiah 9:23-24—“Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the might man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.”

Luke 6:35—“But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.”

Are you alive and breathing today? Are your lungs working and is your heart pumping? It is because of the kindness of God. Are you healthy? Do you have a rational mind? It is all because of the kindness of God. If you've been given the opportunity to know God through a relationship with the Lord Jesus, it is because of God's kindness.

Romans 2:4—“Do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”

God shows His kindness to us while we are still sinners, and the greatest display of His kindness is the gift of His Son. God's kindness came looking for us in the person of Jesus Christ. Titus 3:4 says that when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us, but according to His own mercy. The gospels show us how Jesus was patient and kind to people. Think about all the things He put up with from those immature disciples—Peter constantly saying things before he thought about them, or the skepticism of Thomas, or the hot tempered natures of James and John, the sons of thunder. People were constantly infringing upon Jesus' time and personal space, yet there is not one occasion where we read that He was short fused and unkind with them. Jesus was kind even to His enemies! He knew all along that Judas would betray Him, but He treated him the same

as the rest of the disciples. He even prayed for those who crucified Him, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!”

Expressing kindness

It is unfortunate that we live in a culture where kindness is seldom seen. There’s plenty of rudeness, harshness, and ugliness. The news rarely reports a story where kindness is the headline. Instead, it is robbery and theft, murder and injustice. Our politics have become unkind to say the least. In our highly competitive age, people often view kindness as a weakness. It certainly doesn’t get you anywhere in business or politics. The old adage comes to mind, “Nice guys finish last.” And so those who demonstrate the fruit of kindness swim against the current of cultural callousness and cynicism. They stop to investigate a need, even when others would walk right on by. (Good Samaritan)

Don’t think that kindness means we avoid telling people the truth in our relationships. 1 Corinthians 13:4 says love is kind and rejoices in the truth. Sometimes, the kind thing to do is tell someone the truth even though it may be a tough pill to swallow. Kindness is doing to others as you would have them do unto you. If we’ve experienced the kindness of God, then we ought to express kindness to others.

Ephesians 4:32—“Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

Colossians 3:12—“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.”

Kindness is a garment that we ought to wrap ourselves up in each day. Opportunities are there, if we would look for them. As you go throughout your day, you ought to be concerned about listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit as He prompts you to be kind to people—family members, coworkers, the guy at the cash register, or the waitress serving your table in the restaurant. As Christians, we ought to be known as ‘chrestos’ people. And interestingly enough, the Greek word for Christ is ‘Christos’ which is just one letter different. Stuart Briscoe writes about how in the early years of Christianity,

pagans confused the two words for kindness and Christ. They couldn't decide if Christianity was a religion based on someone named Christos or one based on Chrestos, kindness. If only people coming into daily contact with us could be so confused! Kindness is being like Christ.

3—The practice of GOODNESS (5:22)

“The fruit of the Spirit is...patience, kindness, goodness.”

There is one more fruit that I will mention before we finish, and it is goodness. The priority of patience, the potential of kindness, and the practice of goodness. What exactly is it? Goodness means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. But the fruit of the Spirit is very specific goodness.

Goodness is the character of God. It is the absence of flaw or defect and the presence of complete wholesomeness. It is a rare word that combines the idea of being good as well as doing good. Jesus said that only God is good. In Mark 10:17, when someone came up to Him and called Him ‘good teacher,’ Jesus responded by saying, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.” It was not a denial of His deity, but a challenge to the man’s way of thinking about what he was saying. “You call Me good, but are you also prepared to call Me God?”

Billy Graham—*“The word ‘good’ in the language of Scripture literally means ‘to be like God,’ because He alone is the One who is perfectly good. It is one thing, however, to have high ethical standards but quite another for the Holy Spirit to produce the goodness that has its depths in the Godhead. The meaning here is more than just ‘doing good.’ Goodness goes far deeper. Goodness is love in action. It carries with it not only the idea of righteousness imputed, but righteousness demonstrated in everyday living by the Holy Spirit. It is doing good out of a good heart, to please God, without expecting medals and rewards. Christ wants this kind of goodness to be the way of life for every Christian.”*

The goal of the Holy Spirit is to produce good people, those in whom Christ’s character is being reproduced. People have potential to do great good or great evil. It was the

Russian writer and Soviet dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn who said, “The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart.” Man has this capacity to great evil to his fellow man. If the last 100 years have taught us anything at all, it is that there is no depths to human depravity. But the love and goodness of God goes deeper still! In His goodness, Christ plunged into the depths of our sin and depravity to rescue us from its terrible grip, even though our salvation came at a great price. Jesus died in my place, the Innocent and Good in the place of the guilty and condemned. But now through the grace of God, I’ve been declared righteous! And now as someone who is forgiven, justified, and set free, I can sing and testify of the goodness of God.

Romans 8:28—“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.”

I believe the order of the fruit mentioned by Paul in verses 22-23 is intentional. They flow out of each other. If there is love in our hearts, there will be joy and peace in our lives, and we will be patient and kind people to be around, those who are set apart by a good and godly character. I like the way that one writer has said it, almost poetically:

Love is the Christlike reaction to people’s malice.

Joy is the Christlike reaction to depressing circumstances.

Peace is the Christlike reaction to troubles, threats, and invitations to anxiety.

Patience is the Christlike reaction to all that is maddening.

Kindness is the Christlike reaction to all that are unkind.

Goodness is the Christlike reaction to bad people and bad behavior.

Faithfulness and gentleness are the Christlike reactions to lies and fury.

Self-control is the Christlike reaction to every situation that goads you to lose your cool and lash out.

I’ve heard it said that life is 10% what happens, and is 90% how we react to it. I couldn’t agree more. That’s why you and I must be filled with the fruit of the Spirit. If you sense you are lacking in fruit, look to the Helper. Trust Jesus and surrender your life to Him now!