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WHAT CHARACTER IS AND HOW TO BUILD IT IN YOU AND YOUR KIDS

Galatians Series
Galatians 5:22-23

[PRAYER] Lord, we're going to open your word now and as we do, we come to it with anticipation because we know that you speak through your word. We don't know whether you're going to say something big or you're going to say something small, but we want to be listening for that thing that might be good for us today. We ask, Lord, that you would teach us, you would convict us, you would encourage us. We all come from different situations right now as we enter this room this morning. You know what we all need and you can take the same message and apply it in each one of our hearts in different ways. We're very grateful for your Spirit's work inside of us. So we ask you to teach us. Be the teacher today as we open your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

I want to put two passages together for you today. These are passages that will help you grow in your personal character. They will help you, if you're a parent, work with children as they're trying to grow in their personal character as well.

The first passage I want you to look at is Romans 5:3-4. There are four words there that I want you to see. The four words that are mentioned in Romans 5:3-4 are *suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; character, hope.*

Four words. You can only control one of them. Suffering comes into our lives, character is the result, hope is the byproduct. The one you can control is perseverance. The way you persevere when you're faced with trials or (I'm going to call them challenges today) as we have challenges in our lives, the way you respond to those challenges will determine whether character develops in your life or not.

If you're in the habit of yelling at people when you get upset, that's not handling the challenge well. Likely you won't develop much character that way. We all experience challenges in our lives and the way we respond to them will determine what happens inside of our hearts.

Will the character develop or will it not develop is dependent on that one word, perseverance. I like to slide the word 'plan' in there. What's your plan for perseverance? How are you going to handle the challenges that you face?

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Each one of us has unique challenges. If you're a young person living in a home, maybe you have a challenge living with an annoying sister or with a mother who yells. We all face challenges of various kinds. Some of the challenges we face are financial challenges. Some of them are relational challenges. Some of them are health challenges. Some of them are just inner challenges to do the right thing.

Let's take all those ideas of challenges and put them into that idea of suffering because when suffering takes place in our lives, we have a response that we need to make and that response is perseverance. That's Paul's message in Romans 5 and he's trying to communicate the importance of developing a way of responding, and when you do there is a result. The passage says that the result is character. What is character?

I want to define a character quality for you. A character quality is a pattern of thinking and acting in response to a challenge. Think about that for a moment. A character quality is a pattern of thinking and acting in response to a challenge. It's a pattern. It's a tendency.

If your child has a tendency to argue with you every time you give an instruction, that's a pattern. That's a heart problem. If your child has a tendency to react with anger every time you say no to him, that's a heart problem. It's a tendency.

We all have patterns of the way we relate to people. Those patterns or tendencies are important. In fact, you're trying to figure out what kind of a heart problem you have or a child has, then you want to ask some important questions about tendencies. If it happens once it's an accident, if it happens twice it's a coincidence, but if it happens more than that you better start thinking about the heart because it appears to be a tendency or a pattern that takes place.

We all have patterns of responding to the challenges we face in life. It's those patterns that I think we're going to challenge today as we look at this particular passage of scripture.

A character quality is a pattern of thinking and acting. So we're going to think differently and we're going to act differently. The person who is patient thinks and acts differently than the person who is not patient. If you're going to try to develop a character quality in your life, then you're going to want to think differently about that particular challenge and you're going to want to act differently.

You can plan that. You can strategize how you're going to prepare for that. That's the perseverance part. That's the plan you have whenever you face the challenge so that you can build the character, so that you have a different way of thinking, a different way of acting when you come to that particular challenge in your life.

We all face challenges and in order to meet the challenges of life, we need to be able to have the character that God wants. And that character that God wants to develop in us is a pattern of thinking and acting when we face a challenge in our lives.

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Now we turn to Galatians 5:22-23. It's this passage where we talk about nine parts of the fruit of the Spirit. Let me read the passage to you. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

It's a great list of nine qualities that we all need in our lives. For example, I imagine a person who has a challenge continually feeling down in the dumps, negative, disappointed, discouraged, bad things keep happening. They need a particular part of this fruit. Which one is it? Joy. They need that joy that's going to allow them to experience something inside that isn't tied to circumstances.

What about the person who is easily angered? The person who lives with a challenging person? That person needs patience to meet the challenge. I want you to see how the character quality ties into specific challenges we face in life.

What about the person who's rushed and intense continually? What do they need? They need kindness because kindness has to focus on the other person. Can't just focus on yourself. When you're trying to be kind to someone, you have to think about what they want.

What about the person who's abrupt or forceful? What does that person need? That person needs gentleness.

Each one of the heart qualities or character qualities we're going to look at today in Galatians 5:22 prepare us to handle challenges that we face in life.

You can't say, "Oh that's just how I am. Everybody just has to accept me. At least everybody knows what I think." That's an excuse for ungodliness. Some people say, "Well people don't understand me." Well maybe you need some character and then they'll be able to understand you better. Some people say, "Well if I change, it wouldn't be me anymore." That's probably true. You'd be more Christ-like. There's no excuse to stay without the character that God wants us to have in our lives. We don't want to have excuses and not move toward godliness.

I was traveling home from Bucharest and that requires an ordeal of travel – getting on a plane, then being on a plane, then getting off the plane, and going through customs, so on. There was a lady who I saw before we got on the plane, on the plane, I saw her when we got off the plane going through customs, and then I was standing next to her at baggage claim. I was so impressed by this woman because she was calm through the whole process, obviously calm. You could imagine when you're going through this kind of travel there's a certain amount of intensity and jostling and getting your stuff out and doing what you need to do. She was calm through the whole thing. I saw her several times and I was impressed by that.

I'm standing next to her in baggage claim and I decided to say something to her. So I said, "You know, I'm just really impressed. I've seen you several times on this trip and I'm really impressed at how calm you are." I don't know what she thought of me at that point.

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I saw something in her that I want in my life. I realized that if I'm going to get that in my life it's not going to come by natural means, it's going to come by the fruit of the Spirit. God's Spirit is going to work in me and produce that.

So let me make several observations about this verse before we jump into the individual parts of the fruit.

The first thing that I want you to see is the fruit of the Spirit. It's not a fruit of the flesh. Oh yes, there are times when we can be more patient just by sheer willpower or we can be more self-controlled using our determination. That's not what this passage is talking about. This passage is talking about allowing God to rule in our lives so that those qualities come out in particular areas.

When you walk in the Spirit, your life produces fruit. That's what he's saying here. It's a list of supernatural characteristics. If we focus on walking in the Spirit then these things will be the result.

I also want you to see that it's one fruit, not many. It's not the fruits of the Spirit; it's the fruit of the Spirit. It's a packaged deal. We may emphasize one piece or another piece as we're going forward, but it's not a bunch of fruits. It's one fruit that comes from our abiding in Christ or this fruit that comes from relying on the Holy Spirit in our lives.

It's not that wax fruit. When I was growing up we had some of that wax fruit on that piece of furniture in our living room. Of course you'd never go and eat that fruit. It was worthless.

One time I was in Scottsdale, Arizona and if you've ever been in Scottsdale, Arizona downtown you know that there are these trees there that have oranges on them. The oranges are bright orange and I couldn't believe it. I was saying, "Why are all the oranges still on the trees? Why wouldn't anybody pick them?" So I picked one and opened it up. It is worthless inside and here's why: It's not an orange tree. It's an ornamental orange tree. All of those are ornaments on the outside. It's not the real thing. That's why nobody picks them. They're there to look good.

We're talking about something deeper. We're talking about something that changes who we are on the inside.

I think that some of these fruit that we are going to look at come in combinations, so I like to help people understand what graciousness is. Graciousness isn't listed in the fruit of the Spirit, but here's what graciousness is. It's a combination of three of those qualities patience, kindness, and gentleness. Patience in order to restrain myself a little bit while the situation is unfolding. Kindness to be able to think about what the other person needs. And gentleness which thinks about the approach at the same time. Graciousness is a combination of those parts of the fruit of the Spirit.

Let's look at each part of the fruit of the Spirit. I've created them into some kind of a mission statement. Your Bible may have a different translation of some of the words than my Bible or the one that I'm using at this point. What I've tried to do here is look at the Greek words. I'll share

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the Greek words with you as we go through because that's the important thing. What does the actual word mean in its context? What does it mean in the language that's there?

Let's start at the beginning. *The fruit of the Spirit is love.* This is the *agapē* love, which you know to be that sacrificial kind of love.

You'll need this one if the challenge that you face is sometimes to be selfish or self-focused. A child who is self-focused needs to develop this quality of love that's thinking about others. Sacrificial kind of love.

Sometimes I ask parents when I'm working with them and their families or I ask the children, "Do you have any chores?" Some kids say, "I don't have any chores." Mom will pipe in and say, "Yeah. We didn't want to give them chores because he's got lots of homework and he's really involved in a lot of stuff at school, so we're not giving him chores."

Now that's fine. If that's what they want to do in their family, that's great. However I would warn families this: If everything a child does is about them then we may end up with some selfishness issues. I think it's wise to have children have some things in their lives that aren't about them. It's about contributing to others and thinking about others.

That's what we're talking about here when we talk about love. Love is a sacrifice. People see that in our lives. There are some people who never read a Bible, but they'll read you and they'll see the love that you have inside.

Love is feeling, but that's not what it's talking about in this passage. It's more than that. It's demonstrated in action. It usually means sacrifice. You sacrifice your right to speak and listen instead. Sacrificing your right to be understood. Sacrificing your right to be first or best. Sacrificing your right to fairness.

Love is hard. It touches the very center of our hearts. Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. I think a great family motto or a personal motto is this: Love is action. It happens. It happens because Christ sacrificed for me.

One family went to the fair and Dad and Mom were sitting on the park bench right in the middle of the area and they could see what was going on. As they were caring for the baby, the nine year old and the seven year old girls came and said, "We want to go to the petting area." Dad said, "Okay. Here's a dollar for you, a dollar for you. Go ahead and go to the petting area," which they can see right over there.

After a couple minutes the older daughter came back. Dad said, "What, did you change your mind?"

She said, "No, it cost two dollars to get so I gave my other dollar to Mindy. I was doing love is action, Dad." Because that's their motto in their family. Love is action. It defines their family, who they are, and they're teaching their children some valuable things.

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There's some wax fruit when it comes to love. In our society the wax fruit tends to be other things that take the place of love. In our society sex is tied very closely to love as if it were the same thing. "We're going to make love," as if it is somehow tied into this *agapē* love. It's something different I want you to know. In our society we have tolerance as often shared as a definition of love. That's not love. Tolerating just anything that comes along. Another one is indulgence, to indulge someone. That's not love either. Those are wax fruit, ornamental orange trees. God wants us to have that genuine fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives called love.

Let's go to a second part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Let's go to joy. Joy is *chara*. I would suggest this idea of joy means I choose to celebrate because of Christ's presence in me. Anytime, anyplace I can choose to celebrate even when bad things are happening in my life. Joy is the ability to shine in the process, not just in the resolution. While things are going on, just when things are finished.

Some people say, "Well I'm going to be happy when..." A couple gets married – "We're going to be happy when we have our child." Then they have a child and they say, "We're going to be happy when we get another child to play with that child, to keep that child busy." They may have a number of children and then they say, "Oh we'll be happy when they get into school, then we'll have more free time." Then they say, "I'll be happy when my kids graduate." Then "I'll be happy when they move out of the house."

There's this postponement of happiness, whether it's in the family or whether it has to do with finances. "I'll be happy when I get this amount of money." It has to do with health. "I'll be happy when this happens in my life."

I want you to know there's a difference between happiness and joy. Happiness has to do with happenings, circumstances, things that are going on. Happiness is determined by the number of clouds in the sky. But joy is something much deeper that comes from your heart because of what God has done inside of you and is doing. It's a presence of God in your life. When God is at work inside of your heart then you always have this joy. It never goes away.

I can be in an airport, in the cloudiest airport in the world. But I know when that plane takes off and goes through the clouds, every time, it never fails, the sun is shining up there. It's always there. I don't care how dark it is, how rainy it is, how snowy it is. When you go through the clouds, you always see the sun. Always. It's always there when you get above the clouds.

We don't want to live under the circumstances, allowing circumstances to determine whether we're happy or not. We want to have that internal joy that God provides for us. So when a person is moping around, complaining, focusing on what they don't have, that person needs joy in their life. It comes by walking in the Spirit.

Let's go to a third part of the fruit of the Spirit, which is peace. The Greek word is *eirēnē*. I would suggest that peace means that I choose calm when life presents distress because Christ is my peace.

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My favorite story about peace is part of the fruit of the Spirit takes place in my own counseling practice with a boy who was thirteen years old. This took place earlier this year. His parents brought him to me because he was paralyzed by his anxiety. They couldn't go out into public. They wanted to go to Costco sometimes, but he wouldn't allow that. They couldn't go out into that group of people. They couldn't even go to church without going into the video room because of all the people that were there. They even installed internal locks on doors inside their house to prevent children from going in and around the house so that he could see that because it was so anxious for him when kids got in his line of sight. That is anxiety.

I worked with him for ten weeks. In the tenth week he told his mother, "My anxiety is gone." He came to me on that tenth week and said, "My anxiety is gone."

I said to him, "Was there something that I said over the last ten weeks that helped you as we worked hard on this whole process for ten weeks?"

He said, "Yes. The thing that helped me the most was when you talked about the Holy Spirit."

Here's what I said to him: "The Holy Spirit is not just a plaque on the inside of your heart that says 'I'm a Christian.' The Holy Spirit is that, but He's much more than that. The Holy Spirit moves around inside of your heart and He brings with Him a fruit basket, and part of that fruit is peace that he wants to give you. That peace is like a sponge that will suck up that extra energy that anxiety produces.

But there's something you need to do in order to obtain that peace. Because what happens with anxiety is you tend to go down a path and you say, 'I wonder if that would happen. Well if that happens, if that's going to happen, oh no, then... and so we start down this path in our minds. Whenever we're anxious that's the path that we take.

You need to discipline yourself to stop going down the path, to take those 'what ifs', put them in a suitcase and give them to God. Because you're not strong enough to handle those and God is. In order to do that, you need to yield yourself to the Holy Spirit."

Can a thirteen year old be filled with the Holy Spirit? Oh I've seen it. Yes he can. So here's this boy who practices giving himself to the Holy Spirit and allowing the Holy Spirit to suck that anxiety right out of his life. That's a boy that developed peace in his heart because of the Holy Spirit's work.

It's a freeing emotion, peace. Sometimes that peace is from anxiety. Sometimes it's a peace that we need to take the place of anger that's disrupting our hearts. Sometimes it's a peace that takes the place of guilt that we've done, things we've done in our lives. God produces that peace inside of us. It's a different way of thinking and a different way of acting when faced with a challenge.

The first three parts of the fruit of the Spirit are all emotions – love, joy, peace. But I would suggest they are Holy Spirit-filled emotions. So if you're challenged with emotions, you want to allow the Holy Spirit to work in your life in a significant way.

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Let's look at another part of the fruit of the Spirit. Let's look at patience. The Greek word is *makrothumia*.

Patience always has to do with time. You know that. That's why you don't like patience. It requires that we give time. I would suggest that patience means I will give more time before I react. We do that so that I can make more room for God to work. It's fascinating what happens with time, which is a gift. Patience is a calm endurance based on the certain knowledge that God is in control.

One husband was quite impatient and was angry with his wife continually, often because she was late getting ready. He was not very compassionate and didn't do a lot of work to help out around the house to get the kids ready or get things done. On one Sunday morning, the wife says to her husband, "I've got an idea today. Why don't we switch places? Why don't you get the kids fed, get them dressed, and out in the car. I'll go sit in the car and honk the horn while I wait for you." Well that's not waiting patiently.

But some people think that impatience is a virtue. Did you know that? Some people think that impatience is a virtue and most of those are people who have Type A personalities. It's us people who take charge. It's us people who get things done. We don't have time to wait around for things to happen. So sometimes we can view impatience as a virtue and it gets in the way. We need all of those people who are Type A people. We need those people who get things done.

But I would suggest that the Bible here is telling us that patience is a very important virtue we want in our lives because it's like the oil in the machine. As the machine's getting the work done and pushing everybody along to get it done, patience is that oil in the machine that allows relationships to be enjoyed a little bit more.

Patience is strategic. It is a gift of time that we give to the situation, give to ourselves, give to other people. Very important to understand that patience is a different way of thinking and a different way of acting in response to a challenge.

The next part of the fruit of the Spirit is kindness, *chreistoteis*. Kindness focuses on the other person.

I would suggest that kindness says this: I will brighten the life of someone because God has given me compassion. Kindness focuses on the object. It implies compassion because you've got to think about the other person and what would they feel. Some people are kind to animals because they're compassionate toward those animals.

One mom told me this story. She said, "Our family in the evenings goes around and asks this question – what was a random act of kindness that you did today?" Oh I really like that because it changed the expectation in that home that everyone, all the children, the dad, the mom, were all working on kindness, looking for random acts of kindness they could do. That means they weren't asked to do them. They did them with their own initiative.

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Hold the door open for someone or give a drink to someone. Do something that is some kind of compassionate type of thing. Kindness. It creates an expectation in our lives that we're thinking about others.

I like to call kindness the servanthood fruit. Maybe they're all examples of servanthood, but this one particularly has to focus on another person in order for you to do it. You have to think about what the other person wants and needs before it will work.

It was 103 degrees out when Sam waited for the garbage man to come because he had ice cold Gatorade to give them. He gave them that as an act of compassion. That's what we're talking about. That's kindness.

It's the employee who takes the leftover bagels at the end of the day and takes time (instead of throwing them in the dumpster) to drop them off at the homeless shelter. That is kindness.

In the Bible there are beautiful demonstrations of kindness. David cares for Jonathan's son after Jonathan died. His son, Mephibosheth, was crippled and David cares for him.

The Good Samaritan is a story about kindness, somebody who had compassion on someone else and went outside of his boundaries in order to care for that person.

Boaz was kind to Ruth by allowing her and her poverty to glean the grain behind the workers, and he cared for her.

With kindness you can make a big difference. In fact I would suggest there's leverage here. Some of you like leverage in your activities. This is where leverage takes place. A little bit of kindness can produce a huge benefit in the life of someone else.

I like the story about the boy and the starfish. You've probably heard this story. What happened was a huge storm took place overnight and the next morning hundreds of starfish had washed up on the sand. Each one, of course, would die because it wasn't back in the water. There was a boy walking on the sandy shore and he was taking the starfish one at a time and throwing them back in the water. A man came along and he said to him, "Do you think you can make a difference and help so many starfish?" The boy looked at the man, he looked down at a starfish, picked it up, threw it in the water, and he said, "I helped that one."

I would suggest with kindness we do the same thing. One person at a time we're able to touch people with God's grace. It's a different way of thinking. It's a different way of acting when faced with a challenge.

The next part of the fruit of the Spirit is goodness. The Greek word is *agathōsunē* and it means virtue, virtuous, or good. That's what it means.

I think we need to view virtue as an investment, so I've suggested that the mission statement that would be attached to this part of the fruit is this: I will view virtue as an investment because God is working through me.

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Now when someone sees you being virtuous then they see something good and they're often impressed with that. It's what Jesus was referring to in Matthew 12:33 when he said, *Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.*

This is the integrity part of the fruit of the Spirit. If you're going to develop the integrity in your life then you want the Holy Spirit producing goodness inside of you. The tree trunk represents the heart and the branches represent the fruit. So when people see that fruit of integrity, they see that fruit of goodness, they're impressed with what's inside the trunk and they see that person is different. They often want to know what's making that person different.

Goodness is virtue. Doing what you know to be right. If you saw someone bullied in the hallway at school and you take time to report it – that is goodness. When you pick up litter in the park – that is goodness. The person who turns the wallet in with the money still in it – that's goodness. That's virtue. The person, whether it's an adult or a child, who cleans up after themselves – it's just the right thing to do. That's goodness.

There's no reward. There's no external benefit. Not doing it because they're threatened or because there's some carrot or stick available to them. It's because there's something good going on inside that the Holy Spirit is producing some fruit because that person thinks differently and acts differently about life.

One mom told me how much she appreciated her daughter. Her daughter at age fourteen was allowed to go to the movie at the theater with their other friends, but when she got there she found out that the movie was sold out. The other girls decided they were going to go see a different movie, but this girl knew that her mom probably wouldn't approve of the other movie, the other alternative that these girls were going to go to. What would she do in that moment?

She tried to persuade the girls not to go to that movie, but they were not interested. They wanted to go anyway. So she decided to not go, stay out in the lobby, and she called her mom. Her mom came and picked her up and, of course, praised her for her virtue, for the ability to make a decision in the midst of an ethical dilemma. Young people find themselves in the midst of ethical dilemmas continuously.

What do you do when you're texting and one of your friends who's texting invites another person into a group text and they use foul language. What are you going to do if you have virtue in your life? How are you going to handle that?

When other people are putting someone else down over there and you have to make a decision what you're going to do, virtue is going to defend that person and ally with them instead of agreeing with others and kind of going along with the crowd.

Virtue, goodness, that's what we're talking about here. It's a different way of thinking and acting, and it comes from the Holy Spirit.

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The next part of the fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness. It's the word *pistis*, which means faith. Which is why we have to say when we come to faithfulness that we're talking about convictions or moral beliefs that we have inside. Why do we have these moral convictions or beliefs? We have them because God's word is truth. We recognize that God's word is truth.

I had dropped off my rental car at the rental car agency and got on the bus to go over to the terminal just in time to be invited to a conversation going on in a family that was already going on on the bus. It was a fascinating conversation because a fourteen-year-old boy had apparently taken trash out of the rental vehicle and thrown it in the trashcan.

Dad was just saying to him, "You don't have to do that because they're paid to clean that up and they expect that you're going to leave the trash in there."
The boy said, "Well that's not right. They shouldn't have to clean up our trash."

Now I'm fascinated with the dialogue because both of them are right. It is true that the rental car people there are paid to clean up the cars. It's true that they expect you to leave trash in the cars. But the interesting thing in this particular situation is this boy had a conviction. He had a conviction that leaving the trash in there wasn't a good idea. They were both right.

Now what would the dad do, I wonder. Would the dad defend himself because now he appears to be messy and thoughtless? Or how would he handle this?

Well he's sitting next to his son, his wife's sitting on the other side of the bench on the bus. He rolls his eyes. His son doesn't see that. He rolls his eyes, looks at his wife, and she gives him that look like "your son has a point here." He was quiet for a moment and then he said, "Good point, son. I think taking the trash out of the car is a good thing."

I'm saying, "Yes!" Here's a dad who's willing to affirm the moral conviction of his son who's fourteen years old. He could've defended himself more. He could've argued the fact because he was right. But his son had a moral conviction.

Now sometimes our convictions don't tie into scripture, but many times they do. When we can tie them into scripture, that's really powerful because a conviction is a belief with an action point. It's not just believing it up here; it's believing it and doing something about it. Faithfulness means that I'm going to stay true to my conditions and I'm going to do something about it.

In our world today we live in a world where there's pressure on us to sacrifice our convictions, to give up on our agenda, to start questioning our faith because everybody else is doing it. You seem like such an old-fashioned person when you hold onto these convictions and they seem to be something that's archaic or something that's out of tune with reality of our culture today. What would you do in that moment?

It's in those moments that we need the fruit of the Spirit, which is faithfulness, the ability to hold onto convictions even when others don't. To hold onto convictions because we think differently and we act differently in response to a challenge.

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Let's go on to our next part of the fruit of the Spirit, which is gentleness. This is a fun one. I like this word *prauteis*. Even saying this word *prauteis*, the Greek word, makes you feel gentle.

I think gentleness says this: I will sacrifice forcefulness for grace. I will sacrifice forcefulness for grace. Why? Because I want to care like God cares. It's important to see here.

Now some verses will translate this *meekness*, which essentially means strength under control. You have to realize there's strength here. In gentleness there is strength. But the strength is somehow mitigated by the quality of gentleness that's so important.

When you think of gentleness, you think about picking up a baby and holding your hand under the baby's neck to protect the baby in a very careful way. Or maybe you think about an archeological dig where they're very gentle with their little small picks and brushes as they're digging. They don't use a bulldozer or one of those backhoes to dig out in an archeological dig. That's not what they're doing. Why? Because they want to be very gentle. There are some people it seems they need a personality transplant when it comes to their abrasive, harsh approach to life.

Now it's important to understand the difference between personality and character. There's nothing wrong with personality. Personality is not good, it's not bad. Just we have personalities. They're all moral. They're not right or wrong. We're just made a particular way. God created us with a certain personality, but all personalities have rough edges and it's character that comes alongside a personality that softens some of those rough edges.

So the person who's easy going in their personality, very lax and easy going may also be very unorganized, where things are left everywhere because they're easy going. That person needs a heart quality or the character quality of organization to take off some of those rough edges. In the same way, gentleness takes off the rough edges of someone who's harsh and abrasive. What they need is the Holy Spirit at work in their lives so that they can think differently and they can act differently.

Gentleness acts with the way that we do something. Sometimes we get focused on the end result. "I'm going there," "this is what you need to do," "I know I'm right," "I'm going to get there," "you need to change," and so on. But we don't think about how we're getting there. Gentleness reminds us how we're getting there. It values the relationship more than the issue. That's what gentleness is. It's a beautiful quality that we all need because gentleness says I care. It means I think differently and I act differently in the midst of challenges.

One more part of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. Self-control (*egkrateia* is the Greek word) has to do with restraint. What are we restraining though? I think we're restraining our reactions. So I said here the life motto for self-control would be "I will restrain my reactions by allowing God to control me."

We have a tendency to react and self-control holds back those reactions so that we don't get ourselves into trouble. Self-control enables you to restrain your emotions and think before you act. Self-control helps prevent you from doing something you might regret. It can help you stop

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talking when you should be listening. It can help you take the time necessary to complete a task like homework or cleaning the house or finishing up an assignment for work. It can keep you calm during a disagreement. It can help you save money. It can help you overcome a habit. Self-control helps you get things done.

Let's do a little Bible quiz about people who lacked self-control in the Bible.

Who lacked self-control by eating a piece of fruit even though God had commanded against it? Eve.

Who lacked self-control by giving into peer pressure and ate a piece of fruit also? Adam.

Who lacked self-control by letting jealousy control them and killing his brother Abel? Cain.

Who lacked self-control by complaining in the wilderness to Moses? The Israelite people.

Who lacked self-control by spending all his inheritance on wild living? The prodigal son.

The Bible gives us a verse that helps us understand this concept of self-control. *Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control* – Proverbs 25:28.

Inside of your heart, you have emotions and if they're free to run around then you end up with a problem. But what happens with self-control is it builds a fence around your emotions so they don't get out of control.

In your heart you have desires that can go rampant and we can get into trouble with our desires. You can have self-control to put the fence around those desires in your heart so that you think differently and you act differently in response to a trial or a challenge or suffering.

I think one of the greatest gifts that parents give to their children is self-control. It helps them greatly, but if you didn't get that when you were a kid, you have a second chance here. The Holy Spirit empowers you and provides this as part of the fruit of the Spirit so you can rely on Him. When you walk in the Spirit then you're able to think differently and act differently when it comes to the challenges of life.

Sometimes we have a parenting epiphany. We say to a child who can't face challenges well, "What have I taught you about kindness? What have I taught you about patience?" Well obviously not enough. Or maybe it's not teaching that they need. Maybe it's training.

I would suggest that training is often the practice sessions of life and many of us would benefit from being trained by God in these areas of part of our character, part of the fruit of the Spirit. Because it's the training that's not just for kids. It's training for adults as well. We all need that kind of training or practice sessions to allow the Holy Spirit to work with us.

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Where does that happen? It happens in the challenges of life. So if you have a particular challenge that you face over and over again, that is your therapy session that God has designed for you.

If you have an annoying person who lives in your home, what a great opportunity to start developing a new way of thinking and a new way of acting in response to that challenge.

How do you develop fruit? Jesus told us how to develop fruit in John 15:4. He says this: *Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

Remaining or abiding in Christ, that's how you're going to be bearing fruit. It's not like the branch is over by itself wishing he could produce an apple. He's in the vine, he's in the tree. It's really important for us to be tied into Christ in order to make that happen.

In Galatians (the same passage we're in) we have the words described a little bit differently. It says in Galatians 5:16 – *walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* When you walk by the Spirit, you're allowing the Spirit to control your life and to give you that fruit that needs to be produced inside of us.

That's not easy. It requires practice sessions. What it does for us is in the midst of the challenges that we face, we start to think differently, we start to act differently, and God produces something inside of us called character. It's done as we rely on the Holy Spirit and He does that in our lives.

Young people, I would encourage you to take one piece of this fruit and start working on that in your life and allow God to start producing that inside of you. Work on that for a while and then go to another one and another one and another one. As you do, God will work in you in a way that the Holy Spirit produces that fruit inside of you.

I'm going to ask you to sing a song with me in a moment. This is a song that really talks about dedicating our lives to the Lord and allowing Him to run us and to control us.

You see, what we want in our hearts is we want our heart to be the place where God's royal throne is, where He can set up camp, where He can control things that are going on. That's what we want in our lives and that's what God wants for us in each of our lives.

So you know this song, I'm sure, and as you sing it, I trust that it will be a time for you to reflect on what we've said here and an opportunity for you to just focus on what God might have you do in this area of the fruit of the Spirit.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I thank you for what you've done for us. I thank you for Jesus Christ who died for us so that we can have the Holy Spirit resident inside of us. Lord, we want our hearts to be your royal throne where you can work. We want you to take our lives, use them

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the way you would want to use them. We want to give ourselves to you. Whether we're children or young people or parents, whether we are grandparents or husbands or wives or single people we all need this fruit in our lives. So, Lord, right now we ask you to do a deeper work in us. Teach us what it means to follow you in everything that we do. We're grateful for your love for us. We ask that you would produce that fruit in our hearts and lives today. In Jesus' name, amen.