

Q&A

**a practical guide to cultivating
spirit-filled conversations**



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INTRODUCTION

Our lives tend to be filled up to the brim these days. Obligations. Conflicts. Appointments. Difficult conversations. And that's just our individual worlds.

The entire world is filled with all sorts of global and local debates, tensions, and frustrations. In times like these, we must choose what to fill our hearts with as we navigate these waters. Our most natural tendency is to fill our ears with news networks, podcasts, and endless entertainment. For those who are seeking life in Christ, there is something else we can fill our souls with to navigate the days ahead. This is the point of this book.

Filled, is a bread crumb of an attempt to set our lives in a posture of receiving the Spirit of God to work in us, through us, and around us. As God's people have recounted the past, you always know something true, beautiful, and good is about to come when you stumble across the words, "and they were filled with the Spirit."

This booklet is designed to provide your group with the ability to dwell on one specific characteristic of the Spirit across several weeks or group times together.

For example, if your group meets twice a month, your first gathering can be discussing the *Reflect On It* portion of the characteristic of the Spirit. The next time you gather you can discuss and try out the *Take It A Step Further* section as a group to extend your depth in the study.

For your convenience, we've also highlighted and defined each section of the booklet for you to know its purpose and function within the series.

Unpack: This section serves as a primer to familiarize yourself with the topic of your gathering. Feel free, especially if you are the facilitator, to read beforehand or during your group time to initiate a fresh way of thinking about the specific virtue.

Reflect On It: This portion is designed to prompt conversation, application, and to aid the group in developing an "I will statement." These statements are small action steps that help center the rest of your week around the topic you processed as a group.

Walk With It: If you're looking for a way to integrate this into your personal devotion time, this section will provide a formational practice for you to personally dive deeper into the characteristic of the Spirit highlighted in the book.

Take It A Step Further: This serves as a more in-depth set of questions for your group to continue processing the next time you gather. This also includes a chance to articulate another "I Will Statement" to engage in differently than what you did for the first round.

CALLED TO LOVE

Fruit of The Spirit: Love

*“Fruit is always the miraculous, the created; it is never the result of willing, but always a growth. **The fruit of the Spirit is a gift of God, and only He can produce it.** They who bear it know as little about it as the tree knows of its fruit. They know only the power of Him on whom their life depends.”*

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Galatians presents us with a gospel of love. Redeeming, reconciling love poured out through Jesus for the sake of the world. Love originates with God because God is love. Scripture reminds us that we love because He first loved us. The Psalmist writes that we are redeemed from the pit and crowned with His very true nature — love and mercy. It has always started with Him and has been His active work in us.

In the midst of political polarization, violence, global uncertainty and increased anxiety, we can pause and absorb the good news of the fruit of the Spirit. Not another list of things to try to achieve and check off but a recounting of fruit exhibited in lives invaded by the Holy Spirit. When not living from a place of love, kindness or patience seems unreasonable given our circumstances. Paul speaks a message of hope that goes something like this: “the Spirit of God indwells you and shapes you and enables you to bear fruit that you couldn’t do otherwise.” Paul reminds us that in our freedom we are released from fear and empowered to live holy lives and are not bound by the flesh.

We are able to walk in love. Love becomes our label that points others to Him. It dispels self-interest, hate and anger. It becomes our witness of Father, Son and Spirit - an exhibition of divine power of what the Lord can do in and through us. Love is the only mechanism by which Christians can live out our calling.

REFLECT

1. What needs to shift in your life to enable the Holy Spirit the space to cultivate love more fully in you?
2. If love is our witness what is something specific you can do to point others to the Lord?

I Will Statement:

How as a community can we spend this week identifying barriers we encounter that rob us of the opportunity to love people well?

WALK WITH IT

“Jesus talked to His friends a lot about how we should identify ourselves. He said it wouldn’t be what we said we believed or all the good we hoped to do someday. Nope, He said we would identify ourselves simply by how we loved people. It’s tempting to think there is more to it, but there’s not. Love isn’t something we fall into; love is someone we become.”

- Bob Goff, *Everybody, Always: Becoming Love in a World Full of Setbacks and Difficult People*

Meditation Prayer:

God who is love, make me like You.

TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER

1. What messages have I received that need to be unlearned in order for me to fully grasp that I am free from fear and slavery to the flesh and alive to freedom and growth?
2. Who do I think about when I think of people who love well?

I Will Statement:

In the context of where I live, work, play or worship, how can I invite someone else to journey with me in becoming an extravagant dispenser of the love of God?

NOTES

JOY BOMB

Fruit of The Spirit: Joy

To pursue joy is to lose it. The only way to get it is to follow steadily the path of duty, without thinking of joy, and then, like sheep, it comes most surely unsought, and we “being in the way,” the angel of God, bright-haired joy, is sure to meet us.

- Alexander Maclaren

It is difficult to think of joy while living in the broken world, and yet as we speak the word joy people pop into our mind that are so joy-filled that we can't ignore them. Those are usually people who possess frenetic joy, like the exuberant Bob Goff and his call to joy and to action. One of my greatest compliments in life was my friend's daughter called me a Joy Bomb. I cherish the thought that I have brought joy to others, but my heart immediately bends to those whose lives have been crushing and heartbreaking and it seems that the winds of hardship are constantly blowing in their world. So, when we decide who we believe is joyful solely from the exterior, we may be missing out on the quiet joy of others surrounding us.

Diving into theologian's thoughts on joy is a deep journey that I am just beginning and I am beginning to realize that our American Dream narrative clouds true joy. This dream has tricked us into believing that the more we possess or the more technology advances or the easier our lives are, the more joyful our lives will be. But I think that NT Wright is correct, that our joy comes from the larger narrative, that we have been rescued by God.^[1] Yes, we live in crazy brokenness but Jesus has set joy before us.

Read: Hebrews 12:1-3

We often equate joy with happiness and fun and we often describe happy and fun people as joyful people. It is hard to separate those words in our minds but possibly easier to separate them in our hearts. We seek to stand with those in our faith families that feel rooted in the Spirit and can handle our darker selves with joy, not silly joy — but quiet joy, joy that has been gifted by the Spirit. We all love those mountaintop experiences — weddings, parties, revivals, new babies, releases from prison (figurative and in reality), prodigals coming home — but we all know that is not everyday life. Yes, those bring joy and they are part of God's redemptive story, but there is joy in just being, in just surviving, in holding tight to God's promises, and in feeling the soft confidence of a loved one just being there. The joy of God encompasses all.

REFLECT

1. Who do you know that exudes joy? Tell each other about these joyful people and how they have impacted your life.
2. Is there a lack of joy in this world? Is there a lack of joy in your world?

I Will Statement:

Pursuing joy may feel similar to pursuing patience and feel impossible but can you spend this next week looking for joy in unexpected places?

WALK WITH IT

“Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.... He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing”

- Zephaniah 3:14, 17

TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER

1. How does the Spirit invade our lives with joy?
2. Do we equate joy with happiness and fun?

I Will Statement:

Is there something you need to give up in your life to make space for joy? Expectations? Said yes too many times? Not enough time seeking the presence of God?

NOTES

FILLING UP THE WORLD WITH PEACE

Fruit of The Spirit: Peace

In those days, “The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf and the young lion will feed together, and a little child will lead them.”

- Isaiah 11:6

We are starved for peace. Regrettably, however, peace seems to be missing from most diets. National elections breed distrust and anger. Racial discrimination continues to sow seeds of suspicion and violence. Broken relationships oftentimes lead to broken marriages and broken families. In this world, peace is often searched for, but rarely found.

When humans search for peace, what exactly are they trying to find? Peace is not simply the absence of conflict. In fact, peace often comes only on the other side of conflict. Healing follows surgery, reconciliation comes after confession and repentance, and real, genuine peace comes only after an authentic and sometimes painful encounter with God.

The word “peace,” comes from the Hebrew word “Shalom.” When a Jewish person approaches another Jewish person in the morning and says, “Shalom,” what does that individual mean? This has long been a standard greeting in Jewish culture. Instead of saying, “Good day,” they say, “Shalom.” But a better translation than “Good day,” might be “May you be well.” With this greeting, a person is saying, “I hope today your life works as it should,” or “I hope today you experience life the way God intended for you to experience life.” So, they aren’t simply wishing someone a conflict-free day. Rather, they are wishing them fullness or completeness.

We are starved for peace, for the shalom that comes only from God. Peace is the power of God to make individuals into a body. Peace is the presence among humanity so strong that walls are torn down. Peace is that presence in this world that stands out so much that others come closer for a better look. Those filled by the Spirit of God possess this peace in abundance. As hosts of this peace, followers of Jesus bear the responsibility to bring this peace to the unpeaceful places of this world. So, bring God’s peace to the broken relationships around you. Bring God’s peace to the hate-filled political arguments in your circle. Bring God’s peace to social media, your child’s sporting events, and theological discussions. You are filled with God’s peace, so be a peaceful presence in our world.

REFLECT

1. Why does our world seem to be lacking in peace when so many people in our world seek after it?
2. In what way(s) are those filled with the Spirit of God able to bring peace into the world?
3. In what way(s) have you noticed that peace often follows moments of great conflict? How have you noticed this phenomenon in our world, our church, your family?

I Will Statement:

Will you search for ways to bring peace to unpeaceful places, conversations, and relationships this week?

WALK WITH IT

“O God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference; living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as a pathway to peace; taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that You will make all things right if I surrender to Your will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next.”

— Reinhold Niebuhr

TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER

1. In what way(s) have you contributed to the unpeaceful condition of our world?
2. Are you willing to do the hard work in your life (even if that means conflict) to realize the peace offered to you by God?

I Will Statement:

In what difficult conversations do you need to engage in order to bring about peace in your life?

NOTES

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

Fruit of The Spirit: Patience

We applaud patience, but prefer it to be a virtue that others possess.

- N.T. Wright

The dictionary states that the quality of being patient is the bearing of provocation, annoyance, misfortune or pain without complaint, loss of temper or irritation — an ability or willingness to suppress restlessness or annoyance when confronted with delay. Whoa. Okay, yes, we love these qualities in others as they are dealing with us. But if we truly stop and think about patience, we realize that it is not a virtue that our culture admires or even considers necessary. Instead of saying others are impatient, we say they are strong, leaders, action-oriented, or even that they have the right to ask for what they are asking for. There are some negative words we use for impatience, like aggressive, pushy or entitled. And as Margaret Thatcher famously said, “I am extraordinarily patient, provided I get my own way in the end.” We often laugh at these kind of comments. Maybe it is time for some introspection and for the important work of transformation.

It is difficult to think of patience as a gift and we have been told our whole lives to not pray for patience, but I am starting to believe we need to do just that.

“Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity...we do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” (Hebrews 6:1, 12)

Now that I have been sitting with the word patience and thinking about allowing the Spirit to move us to maturity, I am beginning to see in my mind those moments that I have admired patience — an adult son or daughter caring for their elderly parent, teachers with their students, a new mom with her crying baby, an elderly church member as changes occur, or a nurse with a cranky patient. There is beauty in patience and we have lost the eyes to see it.

REFLECT

1. Before I read through these thoughts on patience, what would have immediately popped into my head when I heard the word patience?
2. Tell a story in which you wish you had been more patient.

I Will Statement:

I will spend the next week being more patient with (name a specific person or in a situation).

WALK WITH IT

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

— Colossians 1:9-14

TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER

1. Does patience have a role in the church family? How can we exhibit patience to each other?
2. Does patience mean that we should always sit back and just let things happen as they will? When is it appropriate to not be patient?

I Will Statement:

Choose an area that is troubling you in your life, in your church, in your group, at work or within your family. Sit with that particular situation and meditate on all the ins and outs. Then decide if this is a situation that requires patience or action and then say to yourself: I will be patient, or I will take action.

NOTES

FIERCLY KIND

Fruit of The Spirit: Kindness

Be kind because although kindness is not by a long shot the same thing as holiness, kindness is one of the doors that holiness enters the world through, enters us through not just gently kind but sometimes fiercely kind.

- Frederick Buechner, *The Clown in the Belfry*

In the early '90s the random acts of kindness movement and pay it forward challenges made a huge impact on our culture. Since then foundations have been set up and special days assigned on our calendars to these activities. Anything that encourages kindness is worth celebrating, and anytime we can pay that kindness forward is a good thing.

Galatians, however, calls us to something more rooted, with more grit and perseverance required. Kindness that is less random, not reserved for a special day on social media, or just offered to strangers. Fruit of the Spirit kindness is offered to the hardest to love, the ones you live with, the least of these, the arrogant, the undeserving, the ones God calls you to. It requires you showing up daily even when you don't feel like it. It is at its core the kindness of the Lord. Believers have received the loving kindness of God and in turn behave toward others as God has behaved toward them. We become like him as we extend love, mercy, compassion and humility to those who are not in a position to reciprocate.

Living out the tender merciful kindness of the Lord to others is hard. It is soul work. It is from the overflow of the heart that is being formed by God himself. The Holy Spirit within the believer shapes and molds us so that our kindness is anchored in the very nature of God and not our own achievements. As we intentionally position ourselves to be transformed by the Lord, our fruit bearing resembles the one from whom it comes.

REFLECT

1. To whom do I need to extend kindness that reflects God's kindness to me?
2. Do I seek to gain from the kindness I show, or is it pure kindness? How do I know?

I Will Statement:

When I examine my daily experiences, am I squandering opportunities for kindness? How can I posture myself to be ready for them when they appear?

WALK WITH IT

Prayer for the Week:

*May Your kindness be our steady anchor and our sure companion.
We are Your image bearers.*

TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER

1. At the core of Jesus' kindness was a desire to reinforce the inherent dignity and value of all mankind. How can your words and actions show kindness, respect, dignity and remind others of their value in God's eyes and in your heart?
2. What does it mean to speak with kind conviction without using words as weapons? To carry both strength and gentleness, to offer kindness even in our anger.

I Will Statement:

In what areas do I need to consider my motivations and boundaries? Understanding my need to be loved and appreciated may motivate my kindness. Is this the fruit of a life fully formed by the Holy Spirit?

NOTES

STANDING BEFORE A GOOD GOD

Fruit of The Spirit: Goodness

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come into His presence with singing. Know that the LORD is God. It is He that made us, and we are His; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name. For the LORD is good; His steadfast love endures forever, and His faithfulness to all generations.

- Psalm 100

Reading texts such as this one conjures memories of standing in front of a massive mountain. Many high school students participate in Wilderness Trek, a week-long spiritual excursion in the mountains of Colorado. Students have often confessed that the thing they remember most about that week was not the difficulty of the climb or the weight of that pack. Rather, they remember standing on a mountain's summit, looking out across that mountain range and feeling so small.

When humans encounter something so enormous, something so much bigger than they are, they often come to a startling revelation. Human beings are really quite small. Such awareness is appropriate and healthy. Targeted by marketing specialists who frequently remind people how good and great they are, citizens of 21st century America need to be reminded that only God is truly good.

The spiritual discipline of confession provides the next step for those brave enough to consider themselves next to a good God. Christians in the present age, especially, need a good dose of confession! Not many people like that word, and even fewer like its practice! Nevertheless, one of the most natural byproducts of coming into contact with God's goodness is an awareness and acknowledgement that apart from God, humans are not good!

The good news of God, however, bears witness that followers of Jesus Christ have been filled with the goodness of God. Christians are not perfect, they are not sinless, and much of the time they are not even likeable. Maybe it is time disciples of Jesus confess those realities and accept the goodness that comes only from the good God who made all of creation.

REFLECT

1. How does the spiritual discipline of confession help us to appreciate more fully the goodness of God?
2. Those inhabited by the Spirit of God possess the goodness of God within. How does this truth impact your daily life?

I Will Statement:

Who can you confess your sins to this week to grow in your appreciation for the good of God and accept God's forgiveness?

WALK WITH IT

Look upon us, O Lord, and let all the darkness of our souls vanish before the beams of Your brightness. Fill us with holy love, and open to us the treasures of Your wisdom. All our desire is known by You; therefore, perfect what You have begun, and what Your Spirit has awakened us to ask in prayer. We seek Your face. Turn Your face toward us and show us Your glory. Then shall our longing be satisfied, and our peace shall be perfect.

- Augustine

TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER

1. Reflecting upon the goodness of God has led some to throw up their hands in defeat, thinking, "I'll never live up to that benchmark, so why even try?" How would you respond to this sentiment?
2. Have you ever experienced the power of confession? In what areas of your life is God calling you to confession today?

I Will Statement:

How can you acknowledge that apart from the goodness of God, you are sinful, imperfect and lost?

NOTES

GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS

Fruit of The Spirit: Faithfulness

God is God. Because he is God, He is worthy of my trust and obedience. I will find rest nowhere but in His holy will that is unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what he is up to.

- Elisabeth Elliot

Because faithfulness is not only a fruit of the Spirit but also a cultural concept regarding relationships, we have simplified its meaning and the capacity in which we give it. At first, faithfulness seems like a concept that is easily described and understood, and maybe even easily performed. However, when we look at faithfulness in the way God exhibits this characteristic in full, it becomes more complex. It is not only about being faithful, meaning dependable and consistent, but is also about being full of faith, having complete belief and trust. While culture often leaves out the latter component, something that is rightfully understood in the cultural definition of faithfulness is that it's present within the bounds of a relationship. If you don't have a relationship with someone, it seems senseless to be faithful to them.

Faithfulness flourishes in a relationship, and we must strive to have a more intimate relationship with God to be faithful to Him, and like Him. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are given the power to be faithfully devoted in a similar capacity to that of God, and we will be motivated to trust Him and His promises, without the presence of doubt. We will adopt a posture of obedience and of trusting Him, both of which require active surrender.

Something especially beautiful about the character of God is that even in our lack of faithfulness to Him, He remains completely faithful to us. As Christopher J.H. Wright points out regarding the troubles of the Israelites in the Old Testament, “even in those horrendous circumstances, even when they were suffering the consequences of their own unfaithfulness, they could still affirm the eternal faithfulness of God.”^[2] As we are assured in scripture, the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promises, and He is faithful in bringing them all to completion.^[3] His promises never waver, nor does his faithfulness to us. And with the help of His Spirit, we can give him the same consistent attention and adoration.

REFLECT

1. How does the way you show faithfulness to people differ from the way you show faithfulness to God?
2. How can you work to deepen your relationship with God so that faithfulness can flourish?
3. Looking through examples, like those listed in Hebrews 11, what are ways people exhibited a posture of faithfulness in the Bible?

I Will Statement:

How can you practice a posture of obedience as you walk through this next week?

WALK WITH IT

Prayer for the Week:

Gracious Lord, thank You for remaining faithful, even when I fail to do the same. Please convict me to live a truly faithful life. Help me discern when I spread my time and energy too thin, so that I may give You more of my devotion rather than the other demands of life. I surrender my desire for control and tendency to doubt, allowing me to trust You and Your promises more. I give my life to You, to be faithful and full of faith.

TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER

1. How has someone else's faithfulness to God encouraged or inspired your own capacity to be faithful?
2. What is a time you have seen God's faithfulness prevail in your own life, even in the midst of your lack of faith in Him?

3. What is something you would ask the Holy Spirit to transform in your life so that you may live more faithfully to the Lord?

I Will Statement:

What is something we must individually surrender to allow ourselves to place more trust in God and his promises to us?

NOTES

THE OVERLOOKED VIRTUE

Fruit of The Spirit: Gentleness

In our world of loneliness and despair, there is an enormous need for men and women who know the heart of God, a heart that forgives, cares, reaches out, and wants to heal.

- Henri Nouwen ^[4]

What if one of the fruits of the Spirit was power? Calming storms, flipping tables, and driving out people might be more awesome than gentleness. But, the Spirit knows that what people need is not more access to power but more people acting from a place of gentleness. When Jesus had the right to cast the first stone at a woman caught in adultery, he showed her compassion rooted in gentleness. When Jesus was being arrested and Peter chops off a man's ear, Jesus gently restored the man's ear and chose his own death in the process. When lepers who could not be in the presence of anyone else came near Jesus, Jesus drew near to them, touched them, and restored their health. Jesus, through his gentle spirit, restores and uplifts all the weary and downtrodden.

Jesus invites us to the same restoration through the Spirit. "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." – Matthew 11:29 A new life is given as we experience the wonderful gentleness of the Spirit who restores us from our worries, our heartaches, our failures and sins, and every other thing that pulls us down and away from God. This new life comes with an expectation, though; just as the Spirit restores us, we must restore others in the same way, through gentleness. This gentleness may manifest itself in many ways, through grace and mercy shown to those who may not deserve it, through radical inclusion of people who have no place to fit in, or through surrendering our needs for the needs of others. As we draw closer to God through the Spirit, let us exhibit the same gentleness that God has shown to us to all who we come in contact with.

REFLECT

1. What does gentleness look like to you?
2. How has someone impacted your life by displaying gentleness toward you?
3. Our world places a great value on accumulating and maintaining power. What are ways that you can choose gentleness over power this week?

I Will Statement:

I will _____ to allow room for the Spirit to cultivate the fruit of gentleness in me this week.

WALK WITH IT

Read Isaiah 42:1-4 and reflect on how you can incorporate the gentleness of the Spirit in your life.

TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER

1. When you google “prayers for gentleness”, it asks if you mean “prayers for loneliness.” Why do you think gentleness is such an undervalued virtue today?
2. What things in your life lead you away from being a gentle person? What things in your life lead you towards being a gentle person?

I Will Statement:

I will _____ to become a more gentle person this week.

NOTES

LEARNING THE REAL ART OF SELF-CONTROL

Fruit of The Spirit: Self-Control

Finally, the inner self is no longer out of control but is marked by 'self-control', which means Spirit-controlled...The energies of God are unleashed in us when we live by faith in God's Spirit to transform. And second, all this happens if we 'live by the Spirit' and 'keep in step with the Spirit.'

- Scot McKnight ^[3]

Read: Galatians 5:1, 22-26

The Apostle Paul bookends Galatians 5 with the words freedom, in verse 1, and self-control, in verse 23. These words, however, while linked, are not natural synonyms for each other. While freedom brings to mind images of fireworks, laughter and having the keys to your first car, self-control invokes gritted teeth, tired runs up the same old hill, and generally, not doing what you actually want to do. Ending the list of fruits of the Spirit with self-control seems a little bit of a letdown from such positive words as joy and love.

So how does self-control lead to a life of freedom in Christ? By not linking self-control to our own fierce determination or work ethic, but instead by adopting a posture of openness to the Spirit's movement in us. This means being guided by the Spirit because our abundant life in Christ is powered by the Spirit. When we place ourselves under the guidance of the Spirit, it "requires submitting ourselves to disciplines and regimens that reach down into our deepest habits. The Spirit of God meets us in that space — in that gap — not with lightning bolts of magic but with the concrete practices of the body of Christ that conscript our bodily habit."^[4]

This submission to the Spirit, allowing ourselves to be guided, shaped, and transformed by the Spirit, is true self-control. It requires discipline to force ourselves, through the power of the indwelling Spirit, to learn new habits, behaviors and ways of living that bring us further in contact with the Spirit's moving. When we allow ourselves to be open to and led by the Spirit, however, we find new life, new joy, and new freedom as the Spirit leads us into the new life that Jesus promises. Self-control, being open to the leading of the Spirit, transforms our lives so that we become filled, participating in and proclaiming the only reality in the age to come: God's kingdom.

REFLECT

1. How would you explain the phrase “open to the Spirit”?
2. In what ways have you seen the Spirit grow the fruit of self-control in your life?
3. How have you engaged in the practice of spiritual disciplines in the past? How are you engaging now?

I Will Statement:

I will _____ to become more open to the Spirit’s guidance in my life.

WALK WITH IT

Create a space (or spaces) this week to open yourself to the Spirit and listen to the Spirit. Spend five minutes in silence, allowing the Spirit to guide you as you clear your mind.

TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER

1. How have past experiences and understandings of the Spirit shaped your understanding of the Spirit’s work in the world?
2. What obstacles restrict you from letting the Spirit lead you?
3. What could you practice this week that would help you open yourself to the Spirit?

I Will Statement:

I will _____ to cultivate room for the Spirit to grow the fruit of self-control in my life.

NOTES

THY KINGDOM COME

The Fruits of the Spirit

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

- John 15:4

When Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians, he is urging his readers to walk by the Spirit rather than by the desires of the flesh. In fact, he claims in Galatians 5:24 that the flesh and its desires have been crucified. To walk in the Spirit, you must first get rid of the flesh. Crucifying the flesh requires confession, surrender, discipline and a lot of discomfort. But this sacrifice allows us to be filled with something better than what the flesh offers us. A cup cannot be filled with liquid if it is already full. In the same way, we must empty ourselves of worldly and fleshly desires, like those mentioned in Gal. 5:19-20, to have the capacity to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Once we empty ourselves, the characteristics that God embodies so perfectly will come to fruition in our lives. Even so, they will not be because of our own doing, but because of God's gracious work within us. When we look at John 15, we are reminded that apart from Him, we can do nothing. These fruits are not characteristics we could develop on our own, but rather "are the qualities that God himself will produce in a person's everyday, ordinary human life because the life of God himself is at work within them."* They are fruits that possess us because of the work of God, and they continue to grow in us and out of us so that we may bring light into our communities.

God longs for us to possess those characteristics by His spirit so that His fruit can fill the earth in the midst of darkness. But to accomplish this, we must continue to abide in His presence by being in close relationship with him. The world is in need of God's fruit to infiltrate difficult conversations, conflict, hatred and darkness. With love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, the space between Heaven and earth will become thin. Thy Kingdom *will* come.

REFLECT

1. What are tangible ways to practice abiding with the Lord?
2. What is a time you have seen an unfruitful conversation or action in our congregation or our world?
3. What is a need in the Highland or Abilene community that the presence of the fruit of the Spirit could satisfy?

I Will Statement:

How can you actively bring these fruits as light into the darkness around you?

WALK WITH IT

Heavenly Father, thank You for longing to be so near to Your children that You have allowed Your presence to dwell within us. Help us to be mindful of our flesh, and give us strength to allow Your Spirit to overcome in our lives. Please ripen Your fruit in our lives, so that we may be instruments for Your glory. We pray that the space between Heaven and earth will become thin as we bring Your fruit into this world.

TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER

1. What is a desire of the flesh that you struggle to crucify that is hindering you from being fruitful?
2. What is a way we justify the desires of our flesh that limits us from exhibiting the fruits of the spirit?
3. What is a specific fruit of the spirit you struggle to practice? Ask the Holy Spirit to ripen this fruit in your life, and pray this over each other.

I Will Statement:

How can you practice crucifying your flesh to allow God to work within you?

NOTES

MEET THE AUTHORS

Julie Danley fills many roles in this world — daughter, wife, mother, nana, teacher, nurse, student, friend — and has just begun her journey as a midwife. Julie works as a midwife in Dallas, Keller, and Abilene. She is a lover of words and the church. People are her passion and caring for women is where she has landed. Julie loves art and beauty, the outdoors, and bike rides around downtown Abilene.

Arlene Kasselmann works as “Momma” to Art & Design students at Abilene Christian University. She is passionate about relational ministry and loves walking alongside people as they pursue Christ. As a native of South Africa, Arlene is dead serious about a good cup of tea and is always up for shenanigans.

Wes Crawford serves as Assistant Professor of Church History and Director for the Center for Restoration Studies at Abilene Christian University. He, his wife Kim, and their four children moved to Abilene in the summer of 2019 after serving twenty years as a preaching minister in Churches of Christ.

Kyle Bowen is the Human Resources Director for Chick-fil-A South Abilene. He enjoys disk golfing, playing pickleball, and serving as a Discipleship In Groups leader for Highland University Ministry.

Lauren Wertheim has been attending Highland for nineteen years and is currently a student at Abilene Christian University. Having studied Global Studies and Child and Family Services, Lauren hopes to engage in a life of ministry to serve those around her.

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