

Creative Living Bible Study



This book belongs to:



CHARACTER THAT COUNTS
STUDIES ON THE FRUIT
OF THE SPIRIT

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Character that Counts

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Character that Counts

Studies on the Fruit of the Spirit

Few pieces of literature have been quoted as much as Galatians 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” We love the sound of these words because they include the most beautiful of human virtues--virtues we want to give and receive.

These verses also describe God’s character as revealed in Scripture and fully demonstrated in the life of His Son Jesus Christ, “the exact representation of His being” (Hebrews 1:3). Furthermore, Scripture tells us that God created us in His own image to reflect His character (Genesis 1:26). Therefore, our fulfillment in life comes as we succeed or fail at being like Him and reflecting His character in the world around us.

While we see people practicing many good deeds, the sad truth is that most people struggle to consistently exude the love, joy, peace and patience which they would like to exhibit in their lives. In our own strength, most of us are pulled toward selfish ways and often fail at being who we want to be and who God wants us to be.

But the good news is that God promises to produce these qualities in us as we continually choose to yield our lives to Him. As fruit is the natural output of the fruit tree, the fruit of God’s Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 is the natural outcome of walking with God and choosing to make Him Lord of our daily lives.

The purpose of this study is to help us experience more fully the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control God wants to produce in us as we trust Him with the details of our lives. Each lesson will cover the biblical definition of one of these virtues, how God develops it in our lives, and its rewards.

Note: Because these topics elicit so much group discussion, you may opt to spend more than one week on each lesson.

The fruit of the Spirit is . . .

Lesson 1

Love

No one would question the song lyrics that state “what the world needs now is love.” Countless human problems would be solved by following the biblical mandate to love your neighbor as yourself. But this unselfish type of love is easier said than done.

The word for love used to describe this fruit of the Spirit in a believer’s life was not a common Greek word for love in Paul’s day. At that time, two Greek words described love. They were *eros*, a passionate, usually sexual love, and *phileo*, tender affection, or friendship love.

But the New Testament used a different Greek word to describe the love of God for us and the love God’s Spirit produces in the Christian. The word for this love is *agape*. It is a love that selflessly acts on behalf of the highest interest of the one loved. Agape love does not depend on feelings, natural human affinity, or worthiness of the one loved. In fact, the agape love which the Holy Spirit produces in us often works with or without natural motivations for love. Agape love often acts contrary to our feelings and has nothing to do with the worthiness of the loved one.

Because such love is the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit, it is to be the identifying characteristic of the Christian. As one song declares, “They will know we are Christians by our love.”

We will begin our study on *Character that Counts* with a look at the agape love that God produces in us as we yield our lives to Him.

1. a. How is the word *love* used in the world around us?

b. How would you describe the love most needed in the world today?

c. What is caused by the absence of love in individuals, families, our society and the world in general?

2. a. What do these Scriptures state about the nature of God?

Psalm 86:15

1 John 4:8b

b. How do the following verses describe God's love for us and the love He gives us for others?

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

1 Corinthians 13:4

1 Corinthians 13:5

1 Corinthians 13:6

1 Corinthians 13:7-8a

c. What positive effects does loving this way have on the people around us?

3. To love with God's unconditional love, we must first experience His love. What do the following tell us about God's unconditional love for us?

Romans 8:38-39

John 3:16

Romans 5:8

Reference: Note 1, "Why did Christ have to die...?" p. 10.

4. According to the following, what is the result of comprehending God's love for us?

1 John 4:19

Ephesians 3:17b-19

5. According to these verses, what does love for God bring about in our lives?

John 14:21,23

6. a. Review Question #2.b. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a). According to the Scriptures, we cannot love with agape love unless God enables us. How does God produce His love in our lives according to these verses?

John 15:4-5

Galatians 5:22-23

Ephesians 5:18b

Note: The analogy in Ephesians 5:18 is that being filled, or controlled, by the Holy Spirit is like being controlled by alcohol—it affects everything we do. **Reference:** Note 2, *Holy Spirit*, p. 12, and Note 2, *Holy Spirit works*, p. 70.

b. According to Romans 5:3-5, what does the Holy Spirit use to develop God's love in us?

c. Optional: Why do you think suffering builds our capacity to love with God's love?

7. Agape love toward others is not based on feelings, affinity or worthiness of the one loved. Rather, it is unselfish action on behalf of the highest interest of the one loved, including the unlovely person and even enemies. How is this love described in the following?

Luke 6:35 (Romans 12:21)

Note: Verses in parentheses () are supportive of the given verse and are optional.

Romans 12:14, 17a, 19

Colossians 3:12-13

8. What other qualities of agape love does the Spirit produce in us as we yield ourselves to His gracious control?

Romans 12:9-10

Romans 12:13

Romans 12:16

Romans 12:18

Ephesians 4:29

Philippians 4:8

9. a. How can self-will, self-righteousness, self-effort or self-focus prevent us from loving with God's love?

Optional: Give an example from everyday life.

b. How do the results in a given situation change when we respond with loving actions rather than selfish ones?

Optional: Give an example from everyday life.

10. What motivation does God produce in the Christian committed to His will?

1 Corinthians 16:14

SUMMARY

11. a. How would you describe God's agape love that is a fruit of the Spirit? (Review #2 above.)

b. Why must we realize God's love for us before we can love with agape love?

12. a. Are there individuals in your life that you would especially like to love with God's agape love? Take a moment to ask God to help you love them in His power.

b. What aspects of His love as seen in this lesson (#2b, 7, 8) do you especially want God to produce in your toward these individuals?

c. What is His promise when you pray for this love?

1 John 5:14-15

13. What part does abiding in Christ and being controlled by the Holy Spirit have in loving with God's unconditional love?

14. a. Experiencing God's love begins with inviting Christ into our lives. He does not force His way into our lives, but waits to be invited. What do the following verses promise?

John 1:12 (speaking of Jesus Christ)

Revelation 3:20 (Christ speaking)

b. Have you ever invited Christ to come into your life? Perhaps the following prayer expresses the desire of your heart.

Lord Jesus, I want to know you and experience your love personally. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive you as my Savior and Lord. Thank you for forgiving my sins. Please fill me with your Spirit and with your love for others.

If you pray this prayer, you can be assured that Christ will keep His promise to come into your life and produce His love in you for others.

LESSON 1 NOTES

1 "Why did Christ have to die in my place?" This is one of the most important yet least understood questions of the Christian faith. The following explanations of various biblical terms answer this question:

a. Propitiation is a biblical word meaning "satisfaction" and refers to the righteous demands of God being satisfied. God will not compromise His attributes of righteousness and justice, and He is therefore legitimately outraged by man's deliberate violation of His will. But God's attribute of love motivated Him to provide a way to bring man back into fellowship with Himself *without compromising* His attributes of absolute righteousness and justice. God's holy character demanded that man's sin be paid for. Therefore, God came into the world in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Because Christ was born without sin and never committed an act of sin, He alone was qualified to bear the holy wrath of God due the human race as He willingly died on the cross for our sin. In so doing He "satisfied" the just demands of God's holy character against man's sin. This act set God's love free to pour out grace on those who receive His gift of salvation. In this way, God is "just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). See explanation in *d. Justification* below.

b. Redemption is a biblical word meaning "to buy out" or "to set free by the payment of a price (ransom)" and refers to a slave being purchased out of slavery. Romans 3:24 says we are "justified freely by his grace through the *redemption* that came by Christ Jesus." As born sinners, we are in the slave market of sin, so to speak. But Christ, the only free man who ever lived (because He was sinless), paid the ransom price of His own blood to purchase sinners out of the slave market of sin and set them free to become sons of God. Only by the price of death can one be set free (Romans 6:23), and only one who is free (sinless as Christ was; cf. Heb. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21) can buy a slave's freedom. By paying the ransom price of His shed blood, Jesus purchased the person who puts faith in Him out of the slave market of sin and sets him free to become a son of God (Gal. 3:13; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Gal 4:4-5).

c. Reconciliation means "to change a person from enmity to friendship." The Bible says that man is born at enmity with God. Sin erects a barrier between man and God because of a sense of guilt in man. This guilt puts him at odds with God. Reconciliation is the aspect of Christ's death on the cross which removed the barrier of man's sin and its consequences and thus took away guilt which caused enmity against God. Christ's death on the cross removed every barrier between a holy God and sinful man. Reconciliation is available to all men, no matter how sinful. While reconciliation is available and sufficient for everyone, only those who accept the gift of this reconciliation personally by faith receive it. "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). "When we were

God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son" (Romans 5:10).

d. *Justification* refers to God declaring us "not guilty" and righteous in his sight, even though we are guilty of sin. God is able to do this because of the life and death of Jesus Christ acting as man's substitute. When God declares a person righteous in His sight, He does so on the basis of the life and death of the One who was acting on his behalf. "Jesus our Lord...was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:24-25). When we put faith in Jesus Christ to save us from sin, God declares us justified, or not guilty, and righteous. We are justified by the death of Christ which paid the penalty for our sin, and we are justified by the life of Christ whose life of righteousness is also credited to us. This justification, which is all by God's grace and received by faith, brings us into fellowship with God as a child in His family.

2 *The Holy Spirit.* God has made Himself known in the Bible as a Trinity; three divine persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), all with the same essence of deity. The Holy Spirit, known as the Third Person of the Trinity, indwells every person who personally receives Christ (John 1:12; 14:16-17; Romans 8:9). The Scriptures reveal the Holy Spirit not as an "it," but rather as a "He," a distinct personality. In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that the Holy Spirit is the member of the Trinity who brings about regeneration or spiritual birth in the believer. While the Holy Spirit cannot be seen, we can see the evidence of His work (3:8). The Scriptures further tell us that when we ask God (Luke 11:13) to "fill" us with His Spirit (Ephesians 5:18b), He responds by supernaturally instructing and empowering us to live the Christian life (Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 3:16-20; Ezekiel 36:26-27). Sometimes the Bible refers to this as "Christ in you" (Colossians 1:27b). See also 2, *Works of the Holy Spirit*, p. 70.