

Fruit of the Spirit **A Pattern for Spiritual Focus, Exercise and Discipline**

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
Galatians 5:22-23

The idea for this came during a trip to South Africa. I rode with a couple of pastors into Botswana, out into the Kalahari to pick up a missionary and come back. We were to pick them up and bring them back, and so had three to four hours to discuss the ministry. There were some tears, some call into question, what do you do when you are serving and suddenly things go bad? As we rode, I suggested turning to the fruit of the Spirit. If you ask, what is the Holy Spirit guiding me in? Paul gives an answer. He lists nine aspects of the fruit of the Spirit and then says, "Walk in harmony with the Spirit and you will not satisfy the desires of the flesh." It occurred to me that given the calendar days of a month, you can take one aspect to focus and pay attention to for each day. The aspects and the days are:

Love: 1, 10, 19, 28
Joy: 2, 11, 20, 29
Peace: 3, 12, 21, 30
Patience: 4, 13, 22, 31
Kindness: 5, 14, 23
Goodness: 6, 15, 24
Faithfulness: 7, 16, 25
Gentleness: 8, 17, 26
Self-Control: 9, 18, 27

Or simply meditate on one of these aspects of the fruit of the Spirit each day, and when you get to the end of the list, start at the top again:

1-Love
2-Joy
3-Peace
4-Patience
5-Kindness
6-Goodness
7-Faithfulness
8-Gentleness
9-Self-Contol

I have since shared this with a number of people. I realized early on that both, there is a wrinkle to it, and I may be on to something. When one day one of the people I shared it with, just walked into my office, said as he entered the door, "Today is patience day." He flopped down

into a chair and began to tell the things happening that day that were requiring patience. Yes, we laughed, because that is what praying for patience is like. An hour or so later after many eyerolls and much counseling, he left.

One other thought. "It's faithfulness day. The Bears are playing. It's not going well. I will faithfully root for them." Then there are the love days, joy days, peace days, and kindness days.

I have practiced this on and off ever since. It has provided focus and help during difficult times. So today is self-control/tolerance day. Eyeroll. But tomorrow is love day, then joy and peace.

Beginning Thoughts

There are many different ways to go at this and many scripture verses on it. Meditation can begin with any of those verses. But if I were to write beginning thoughts on these nine, I would go through the nine one at a time: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control. Here are some beginning thoughts to get you started. Some are short, and some are longer.



Meditating on the
Fruit of the
Spirit

LOVE

I am amazed at the consistency of love I receive from my wife. Thirteen months ago, I suffered a stroke. She has been constant in care, in love. My recovery to this point is largely due to her. Today I was able to read a full page of the Portals of Prayer.

Love

The Lord, . . . a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast **love** and faithfulness . . . Exodus 34:6

You shall **love** the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Deuteronomy 6:5

O Lord, I **love** the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells. Psalm 26:8

You shall **love** your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 19:19

For God so **loved** the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **Love** never ends. 1 Corinthians 13:7-8



JOY

Joy is putting your hands in the good, black soil in the garden. Joy is picking a red, ripe tomato for a tomato sandwich. Joy is a peach from your tree that is so juicy that you have to stand at the sink to eat it because of the juice trickling down your chin.



Joy

Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and **joy** are in his place. 1 Chronicles 16:17

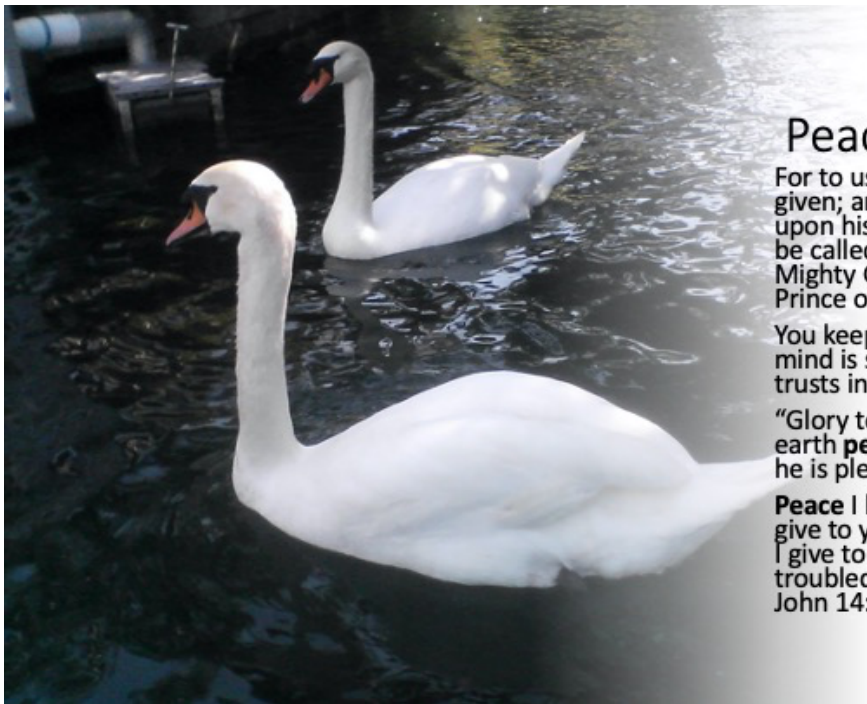
the **joy** of the Lord is your strength. Nehemiah 8:10

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a **joyful** noise to him with songs of praise! Psalm 95:2

Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of **great joy** that will be for all the people. Luke 2:10

PEACE

In Hebrew, Shalom (שָׁלוֹם). Be at peace/harmony with God. Be at peace with your neighbor. Be at peace with the blessings and trials of life. And that is the basic understanding of contentment.



Peace

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of **Peace**. Isaiah 9:6

You keep him in perfect **peace** whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Isaiah 26:3

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth **peace** among those with whom he is pleased!" Luke 2:4

Peace I leave with you; my **peace** I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. John 14:27

PATIENCE

Last year we planted a garden, put in the seeds and waited. “Are the tomatoes up yet?” “No.” “Eggplant?” “No.” “Brussels Sprouts?” “No.” So we just wait. It’s patience day. That’s the way it is with a lot in this life.

Patience

As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with **patience**. Luke 8:15

But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with **patience**. Romans 8:25

with all humility and gentleness, with **patience**, bearing with one another in love, Ephesians 4:2



KINDNESS

Kindness is to help somebody in their time of physical or emotional need. It is what my wife has done for me. It cannot be required or demanded, because then it would not be kindness. I try to remember that, and sometimes I'm not successful. But there is a habit in our world of demanding kindness. When somebody sees through that, and though it's not deserved, a person shows kindness anyway; that is very special.

Kindness

Whoever pursues righteousness and **kindness** will find life, righteousness, and honor. Proverbs 21:21

what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love **kindness**, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8

by grace you have been saved — and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 5b - 7



GOODNESS

There are other aspects of the fruit of the Spirit that are specialized: kindness, gentleness, etc. Goodness by contrast is a generalized aspect. We read in our catechism the Lord's Prayer, fourth petition and explanation. It has to do with our daily bread, and all the needs of body and life.

In one of my jobs, I was given a basic corn broom. I daily had to sweep off in front and around the store. I learned how to use a corn broom, the strokes, and various things, to not bunch the strands together but to flare them and enlarge the sweeping area for each stroke. Goodness means in part, to do what you do well. So, with a corn broom, bagging groceries, whatever you do, do it well. If you are to sweep the kitchen, goodness means to sweep it well. It will be clean. If you are to shovel the walk, you will shovel it well, so it is safe to walk on. It means if you are going to prepare a meal you will take the dietary needs of the family into account so that you prepare a meal that tastes good and is healthy. That is goodness. Back when your mother put vegetables on your plate, that was a goodness. They came from God and were there for your strength and health.

Goodness means to be a giver of blessings that you have received from God so that others may benefit. It pulls back in and doesn't run ahead. For example, in the television series Monk, he has a substitute caregiver who decides to rearrange everything to her convenience. She tells him to grow up and get over it. She makes his life miserable. She does everything she can to her own convenience. That's not goodness.

In part goodness means to take your place in the line of those who pass on blessings, the good things in this life. A policeman gives goodness. A fireman gives goodness. A worker at the grocery store sorting fruit gives goodness. Someone who sorts out your computer so that it works again, gives goodness. You feed your cat or dog or family pet, you are giving goodness.

Spiritually parents bring their children to church, they are giving goodness. A child gives goodness to their parents when they are cooperative and bring joy to their family. All of this takes the idea of goodness and brings it into a relationship with God and that we are to be givers of His blessings. Goodness ties in with the idea of staying with the simple and basic, and appreciating the simple good things. It

also has to do with the quiet spirit of contentment. To recognize the good and appreciate it. The corn broom was the simple job of sweeping the walk, but in doing it well it gave something good to others.

In all that you do, seek to do good to one another. Luther says that the German word Got (God) comes from the German word Gut (good). God is good.



Goodness

Let your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let your saints rejoice in your **goodness**.

2 Chronicles 6:21

Surely **goodness** and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Psalm 23:6

We shall be satisfied with the **goodness** of your house, the holiness of your temple!
Psalm 65:4

FAITHFULNESS

One way of thinking about faithfulness: faith pertains to man; faithfulness pertains to God. Faith is to believe the words and promises of God; faithfulness is when God keeps His words and promises. That's fine as far as it goes, but what if we push a bit further. Human beings can be called faithful when they keep their promises (in marriage, employment, etc.). Some push too far and things get odd. They talk about their promise keeper oaths and name themselves oath keepers, and all too often we find they've slipped sideways away from the spiritual and into the political. Presuming to define what everything is all about they miss the stuff of the soul and the stuff of the Spirit. Meanwhile, can faith pertain to God? In several ways:

1) when one Person of the Trinity holds to the words of another. This is the binding together of three Persons in one God. Jesus says, "Yes Father, because such is Your good and gracious will." In which case "faithful" takes on the meaning of "full of faith". And again, we are back to talking about Jesus as the "author and perfecter of faith, Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross." He holds all things together as the GodMan. He takes on both roles of being the faithful keeper of promises, and the faith-filled believer of the promises. He is the One who both walks with us and calls us to follow Him and trust Him. Sunday morning, He is the one we worship and the one who leads our worship of His Father. He keeps the promises He gives and believes the promises He has given.

2) In Psalm 119, He is God who deals with the disciple. He is God who calls the disciple, watches over him, and brings him along. And He is the Great Disciple, who turns to His Father in His prayer and devotion. This basic truth sets the structure of the whole creation. When we say He is the author of faith, He is the one who invented the thing. We look closely here because this is how the GodMan, Jesus, heals the separation. He comes to us to stand with us on our side of the separation, and to go to His Father in complete and perfect faith. He repairs what C.S. Lewis calls the "Great Divorce", the division between heaven and earth; between physical and spiritual.

In summary, we expect human beings to seek to be faith-filled; and not as much faithful. We think of God as faithful; and not as much faith-filled. But it is precisely at that point where the wondrous happens. It is where God, the second person of

the Trinity, comes to be one of us and to assume human aspects, specifically here – the aspect of faith. That is where we are startled awake, our vision of God, man, and reality changes. The definition of metanoeo (μετανοέω) comes into play: to have a complete change of mind, thinking and understanding.

As he walks the silent road up to Jerusalem, remember how John starts out, “In the beginning was the Word. . . and the Word became flesh.” Jesus walks the silent road up to Jerusalem and Calvary. As He walks that road, silence is joined by darkness (John “The light shines in the darkness”). And silence and darkness are joined by pain (“Father forgive them”). And silence and darkness and pain are joined by judgment (“Eloi Eloi Lama Sabachthani”). And silence, darkness, pain and judgment are joined by death (“Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit”). At the same time, he comes from God to us, and He goes representing us and bringing us to God. Faith is at the center, because He brings and believes the words and promises of God to us. He proves that those words and promises are given to us and are there for faith and to be believed no matter what the silence, darkness, pain, judgment, or death we see around us. The Word sounds in our silence, the Light in our darkness, The promise to our pain, the forgiveness to our judgment, and the life to our death.

Faithfulness

The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and **faithfulness** Exodus 34:6

Your **faithfulness** endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast. Psalm 119:90



GENTLENESS

It may sound counter intuitive, but it is the strongest among us that are more often referred to as gentle. It is reflected in language when someone was called a “gentle giant.” And we do notice when we see a picture of a military hero carrying a child out of rubble and a damaged building, or a fireman escorting a ninety-year-old lady out of a fire at a nursing home, or the football lineman picking up and hugging his two-year-old daughter.

Gentleness is very much in place when a strong person protects the weak or helpless from danger. There can be great force to ward off the danger, but within the protection there is great tenderness and a soft touch. So, it has always been, and it delights us to see it. With that understanding think about our mighty God, the great and awesome power He uses to defend those he cares for. It is not just mighty power unleashed. It is power, focused, constrained, directed against the danger. But within His protection, how great is the tenderness, the care for those protected. The ultimate example of this, of course, is Jesus. As He heads toward Jerusalem and Calvary, He guards, keeps watch over, and protects Mary, his disciples, the children in the temple, those who come to be healed, the woman who gives her two mites. He gently reprovcs Peter with a look and warns Judas at least three times to turn from the path he is on. He prays for the soldiers, gives comfort and salvation to the thief next to Him, and John, and Mary hear themselves gathered together as His family.

As He does this, the dangers, threats, and harm increase from the arrest posse to physical abuse during his hearing before the council, to Pilate’s guard, jamming a crown of thorns on His head and taking turns hitting Him with a rod, demanding that He prophecy, “who hit you?” to the nails and crucifixion, the mockery, the death, and the spear. Notice the strength with which He endures the violence from outside. Contrast that to the tenderness with which He guards those within His care. Even Pilate hears that his is not the greater sin. There he is within the tender care. Truly His gentleness is an exhibition of His might and power.

We are then given to each other to care for each other. Gentleness.

Gentleness

You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your **gentleness** made me great. Psalm 18:35

with all humility and **gentleness**, with patience, bearing with one another in love
Ephesians 4:2



SELF-CONTROL

Self-control, we are expected to “take it in hand.” That is, we are expected to rule through the nobler parts of our nature over the lower part. Reason is to take control over emotion. The mind, over the body. What the Greek philosophers would call “the noble part” over the “bestial part”. And yet, that is not enough. The ability and facility of reason and logic can be applied to either good or evil. Instead it is the spiritual part, what they called the kingly part, that is to rule the mind (the noble part). What is the difference? There is a song, “The problem is all inside your head she said to me. The answer is easy if you take it logically. . . 50 ways to leave your lover.” (Paul Simon)

Exactly. The reasoning part can be applied either direction. It is exactly at that point the spiritual part says, “Wait a minute! That may be true, but what is good and right, just and true?” And so, man is made to think in moral terms, and ask questions of right and wrong. That’s how it has been since the beginning. Adam and Eve are faced with the question, being given so much good and so many blessings, whether they will go along with just one thing, don’t eat from that one tree. The answer is also reflected in the song. It ends “She said, Why don’t we both just sleep on it tonight, and I believe in the morning, you’ll begin to see the light. And then she kissed me, and I realized she probably was right.” That’s the twist. When you bypass and neglect the spiritual, moral part, you do not by default stay with the reasoning, noble part. You end up with the bestial part. For Christians the alternative is even more sharply delineated. It is the difference between good and anti-good, between moral and anti-moral, between spiritual and anti-spiritual, between God and anti-God. One of the things we are not free to do is not take a side on questions of right and wrong. Self-control does not mean that we remain neutral, evaluate and judge each point independently. We are expected to take a stand, and for that stand to be for what is right and good, true and just.

Self-control is also sometimes measured out in the things you don’t say. (The internal dialogue says, “Don’t say it, you fool!” Don’t say what? “Don’t say, ‘You don’t need help to look fat.’”)

Self-Control

A man without **self-control** is like a city broken into and left without walls.
Proverbs 25:28

for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and **self-control**.
2 Timothy 1:7

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.
2 Peter 1:5-7

