

2021 Lenten Devotional

Theme: Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22 – 23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Christianity is not a matter of outward rule keeping, but inward: the character of your heart.

Day 1

Matthew 22:36 – 40

An expert in the Law tested Jesus, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Jesus connects love for God and love for neighbor. How can you say you love God if you don’t love others, even your enemies? This is a call back to the true meaning of the Old Testament and it is the foundation for the New Testament teachings of how we are to live as God’s people.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me your ways. May your Spirit transform me and help me grow in my love for God and my neighbor. Amen.

Day 2

John 15:12 – 14

Jesus said, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.”

The Greek word translated “love” is agape. It was a word for love rarely if ever used in ancient Greek. But it is the word used for God’s love in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Jesus day. Here Jesus gives it the New Testament meaning: self-sacrifice, putting the needs of others first. For God so love the world that he sacrificed his own Son for our salvation as an atonement for our sins. That’s the Spirit of God.

Prayer: Thank you Heavenly Father for your great love for us, for me. Help me by your Holy Spirit, to be a reflection of your love, demonstrated in the person of your Son, Jesus our Savior. Amen.

Day 3

1 Corinthians 13:4 – 7

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Paul wrote this description of agape love. It is comprehensive. Love is *the* fruit of the Holy Spirit. Love naturally does all these things. They all flow from the nature of love, which is putting others first, kindness, compassion, faithfulness. The opposite of love is to be mean spirited, disdain; and with words, sarcastic, caustic. But the opposite of love is also disregard, indifference, or neglect of other’s needs.

Prayer: Lord, help me to love, to see the needs of others: physical, emotional, social, and spiritual. Help me to be kind, thinking not of so much about myself, and more about others. Give me the eyes and heart of Jesus. Amen.

Day 4

Ephesians 3:16 – 20

Paul to the Ephesian church, “I pray that out of God’s glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge —that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

True Christian faith is open to the work of God’s Spirit to renew us through the Word of God: written in the scriptures and in Christ the living Word. It is our desire to be more Christ-like, to have Christ Jesus in our heart, that is, to be more loving like has is, to have the same mind, to be one with Christ as his disciples. This is what it means to have the fulness of God in our lives.

Prayer: Lord God, help me to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to be a reflection of that love. Come into my heart Lord Jesus. Amen.

Day 5

Gal. 5:13, 14, 6

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free [free from the condemnation of the Law]. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ...The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Luther said that as Christians we are “simultaneously saint and sinner”. We still live in the flesh with all its “passions and desires”. Our lower nature can pull us toward selfish actions, acting out of anger, greed, pride, or gratifying sexual desires outside of marriage. The Holy Spirit pulls us toward love in each situation. The Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of love, helps us be patient, kind, forgiving, humble, and looking out for the others true interests.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, when my flesh pulls me in the wrong direction, pull me back. Help me to not give in to selfishness. Help me to love and so to see and help meet the needs of others. Amen.

Day 6

1 John 3:16 – 18

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

Love with actions and in truth. I’m reminded of how my Mom would stop what she was doing to help us or give us the last cookie or whatever. Love looks out for the other person, even if it means letting go of what you wanted. But it’s not just caring for your family and friends but also the strange, the foreigner, even someone who you don’t get along with. Love goes the extra mile and turns the other cheek. It’s laying down our lives in small ways each and every day. Mother Teresa: “We do no great things; we do small things with great love.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, may I be like you. You touched lives with love in so many big and small ways. Help me to be more other-centered and less self-centered. Help me to love with actions and in truth. Amen.

Day 7

Romans 12:1, 2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

It is hard not to conform to the pattern of this world. It's what we grow up in. It's in the TV shows and movies we watch. It's the impatience and sometimes rudeness that we experience driving or in other places. Paul says, "be transformed by the renewing of your mind". That is a command, but it is in the passive voice which means, "Let yourself *be* transformed." We need to let go and let God do it. The Holy Spirit is the one who can work the fruit of the Spirit within our hearts. Just be careful not to get caught up in the worries and concerns of the world.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I yield to the work of your Holy Spirit in my life. Draw my heart to you, guide my thoughts, grow the fruit of the Spirit in my life. Transform me more and more into the likeness of Christ. Amen.