

Foundations Lesson #10

The Remaining Fruit of the Spirit, Part 1: Kindness

In writing to the churches in Galatia, the apostle Paul says, “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” (Galatians 5:22-23). This fruit, or evidence, of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives must be developed and grown so that we will continue to mature in the Lord. As we've mentioned in the previous lesson, this fruit of the Spirit grows as our *nature* is changed. It's not just a matter of our learning new outward behaviors, it's a matter of our having an inward change of heart.

Kindness is defined as the quality of being pleasant and considerate, friendly, benevolent. The word in the original Greek text, *χρηστοτης*, describes the ability to act for the welfare of those taxing your patience; it describes someone you would love to have for a friend. I think of kindness when I hear of a young man shoveling snow for his neighbor just because she's a 60-year-old widow with arthritis, or a busy mother of three cooking a meal for a woman who just got home from having heart surgery. Kindness is usually practiced by those people who firmly believe what our Lord Jesus said, that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). Yet kindness can also be as commonplace as saying “please” and “thank-you.”

The most important truth about kindness you'll ever need to know is that God is the kindest person you'll ever meet. One man has given the testimony that he was disobeying God, and yet God was blessing him. God was overflowing with kindness to him, even though he knew full well he didn't deserve it. Finally, in frustration, he cried out to God. “God, why are you doing this? I'm being disobedient, yet you keep on blessing me. What's wrong with you?” God answered him saying, “This is what I'm like. Live with it.” And with that, God's grace broke the grip of sin over that man.

Let's take a look at God's kindness in the Scripture.

Ro. 2:4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

If it weren't for God's kindness, every time we messed up God would decree justice leading to his judgment being poured out on us.

Gen. 39:21-22 the LORD was with him [Joseph]; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there.

Ex. 1:20-21 So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

Lk. 6:35 [Jesus speaking] But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

There's a similar passage in Matthew's gospel that describes God's kindness by saying that he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. That passage ends by Jesus telling us to be perfect, just as our Father in heaven is perfect.

Ac. 14:17 Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.”

Everyday comforts, conveniences, and needs being met are actually demonstrations of God's kindness. So we see the abundance of God's kindness expressed to us in many and diverse forms. But we also have to understand that what we have received from the Lord, we are required to give away to others.

Eph. 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Col. 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

I Th. 5:15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

Kindness has a way of coming back to those who practice it, sometimes in most unusual ways. The great pianist Ignacy Paderewski was asked by two college students at Stanford University to hold a concert there. He agreed for a guarantee of \$2,000. The students reasoned that the difference between the profit from the performance and the \$2,000 would give them some much-needed help in paying their college expenses. After the concert, the youths explained that the ticket sales had only come to \$1,600, which they gave to Paderewski, along with a promissory note for the other \$400, explaining that they would earn that amount at the earliest possible moment.

Paderewski wouldn't have any of it. He tore up the promissory note and told the boys to pay all their expenses out of the \$1,600, for each of them to keep 10% for their work, and then if anything remained, to give him the rest.

Years later, the war ravished Poland, and Paderewski appealed for relief aid for his beloved homeland. After thousands of tons of food came to the aid of his people, Paderewski traveled to Paris so that he could personally thank the man responsible. When he did, Herbert Hoover smiled and said he was glad to be able to help someone who had shown kindness to him years earlier when he was a student at Stanford in a deep financial hole. We need to remember, a kindness shown is not a kindness lost, it's an investment that has eternal rewards. As it is shouted into the forest, so it echoes back. Give and it will be given to you. Jesus said that even someone who provides something as simple as a cup of water to one of his followers would certainly not lose their reward (Mark 9:41). He also instructed us, when we give a banquet, to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Even though they would be unable to repay us, we will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous (Luke 14:13-14).

I'd like to close with a short poem. It reads,

POEM

I have wept in the night,
For shortness of sight,
That to somebody's need I was blind.

But I never have yet
Felt a twinge of regret
For being a little too kind.

Amen.

Foundations Lesson #10

The Remaining Fruit of the Spirit, Part 2: Goodness

Goodness is defined as the quality of being good (as opposed to being bad), virtuous, honest, reliable, pure. A.W. Tozer has said, “The wise Christian will be content and serve his generation in the will of God. If he should be overlooked in the religious popularity contests he will give it no attention. He knows whom he is trying to please and he is willing to let the world think what it will of him. He will not be around much longer anyway, and where he is going men will be known not by their approval ratings but by the holiness of their character.” From the original Greek word for goodness, *αγαθωσυνη*, we get the emphasis on both being good and doing good. In our world, goodness is no longer popular. Calling somebody a “do-gooder” or a “goody two-shoes” is not a compliment. But despite some negative connotations of goodness, most people would still rather have their addition built by a “good” carpenter, or send their children to a “good” school, or be married to a “good” person, or be the patient of a “good” doctor. Since goodness, like every other fruit of the Spirit, comes from God, let's examine the Scriptures to see what they say about God's goodness.

Ps. 34:8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

Ps. 100:5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Ps. 106:1 Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

In teaching children the ways of the Lord, some Sunday school instructors have taught their children a few responsorial phrases. The teacher would say, “God is good,” and the children in the class would respond by saying, “all the time.” Then the teacher would say, “And all the time,” to which the children would reply, “God is good.” Now that's a nice technique to help children remember an important truth, but for us adults the danger is that repeating such phrases can become so rote that we fail to appreciate the powerful and profound truth that's being declared. God *is* good – all the time. If that wasn't the case, all of life would be a complete disaster.

Ps. 27:13 I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

In heaven, it'll be incredibly easy to see the goodness of God. But because we live in a fallen world where sin abounds, it's much more difficult to see the goodness of God now. Difficult or not, it's both possible and necessary for us to see the goodness of God. David, the author of Psalm 27, has great trust, great confidence, that his eyes will not fail him, and that, somehow, God will make his goodness so obvious that it'll be clearly seen, even in the land of the living. I believe we'll see as much of the goodness of God as what we're looking for. Jesus did say, “seek and you will find.”

Ps. 23:6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

In this Psalm, David writes about the many benefits he's experiencing because the Lord is his shepherd. He ends the Psalm with this verse, declaring that he would have the eternal blessing of dwelling in the house of the LORD, but even before that was to happen, God's goodness and love would be with him all the days of his life. We believers can have the very same confidence.

Ps. 116:12 How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?

When we consider God, the question is not, "Is God good?" God is good. Always. The question is, "Have we been sensitive to God's goodness?" Or have we been dull to it? Have we seen, have we appreciated, have we sensed, have we realized God's goodness? Or have we been oblivious to his goodness, unmindful of it, inattentive to it? The Psalmist in this verse, quite wisely, does not question the goodness of God. He just ponders what could possibly be appropriate for him to do to repay the LORD for all his goodness.

Ps. 145:7 They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

Ac. 10:38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

Jesus went around doing good. He's our example. John Wesley had a rule. It was this: *Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can.* That brings us to the next point on our outline, that since God is good and since we believers are his sons and daughters, we should **be** good and **do** good just like our heavenly Father.

Ro. 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Let us realize that good always triumphs over evil. We may not see that as clearly in this world as we will see it in the world to come, but good always triumphs over evil.

Mt. 5:14-16 [Jesus speaking] "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl, Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Eph. 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Mt. 12:35 [Jesus speaking] The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

Col. 1:10 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,

In the Parable of the Talents, as recorded in Matthew's gospel, chapter 25, Jesus tells a story of three servants who were each entrusted with a large sum of money by their master. When the master came back from the journey he'd been on, he required an accounting from each servant as to how they'd handled his money. Two of the three servants did well; they were each able to double the assets of their master. The third servant did not do well; he only gave the master back his original asset with no gain. It's quite interesting that the two servants who did well, even though they had been given widely different amounts of money to start with, both heard the same reply from their master, word for word. He told them, "Well done, **good** and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" That story of Jesus is an indication of how God will handle the eternal judgment to come. Lesson #16

on Eternal Judgment goes into far greater depth on that subject. For now, I'd like to point out how important to God the qualities of goodness and faithfulness are. He says, "Well done, **good** and **faithful** servant." If we excel in goodness, we'll please our Lord and Master. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #10

The Remaining Fruit of the Spirit, Part 3: Faithfulness

Going to the back of the outline, Roman Numeral seven deals with the subject of faithfulness. Faithfulness is defined as the quality of being reliable, dependable, trustworthy. Hudson Taylor was a missionary to China and the Founder of China Inland Mission. One Tuesday he was told that the mission needed twelve thousand dollars by noon that Friday or they would have to close down. (By the way this happened in the late 1800s when \$12,000 was worth a whole lot more than it is today.) So in their meeting that day, Taylor prayed. His prayer went something like this: "O Lord, you have always supplied all of our needs. This is your work and not ours. We have no doubt that by noon on Friday you will provide the \$12,000 we need in order to continue functioning. But because the secretaries have been so overworked recently, we ask that this time you would meet the need by sending in twelve gifts of \$1,000 each. Thank-you, Lord." By noon on Friday, twelve gifts of a thousand dollars each had arrived. People often said to Hudson Taylor, "Hudson, you have great faith." To which he would always reply, "No, I just trust in God's great faithfulness."

George Müller was the founder of several orphanages in Bristol, England. One day Müller and his staff had absolutely no food for the orphans or for themselves. They asked Müller, "What are we going to do?" Müller had all the tables set and all the orphans come into the dining hall. Then he prayed, thanking God for the food he would give them that day. While he was praying, there was a commotion outside. A wagon had pulled up with all the food they needed for several days.

The key in both of these stories is a condition of heart, that says, "I know God, and I know that he is faithful. Therefore, it doesn't matter what we're experiencing right now. He will take care of us. He will provide. We can always count on God. He is reliable, dependable, and trustworthy.

Heb. 10:23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Ex. 34:6 And he [the LORD] passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,

Ps. 100:5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

I Co. 1:9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

I Co. 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Do you know what's happening when you're facing more than you feel you can bear? God is giving you a compliment. That's right, a compliment. He knows better than you do what you can and cannot bear, what you can and cannot handle. And he's letting you know that you can actually handle more than what you thought you could. He is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what

you can bear.

We've all known people who've been able to put their trust and confidence in someone to get a job done. Maybe it was a running back who knew that the offensive guard would do whatever necessary to move the defensive lineman out of the way. Maybe it was the boss who knew that a particular employee would always come back with the assignment completed thoroughly and excellently. Maybe it was the home owner who hired a carpenter because that man had developed a reputation for always doing quality work and getting it done on time. My question to you is, "How would you like to be trusted like that? How would you like it if people talked about you behind your back that you were reliable, dependable, and trustworthy?" I want to encourage you. That's possible. It's attainable for you, for me, or for anyone else. How can you achieve that kind of standing in the eyes of others? Be faithful! Be faithful consistently, over years and years. Be faithful in everything you do. Refuse to take short cuts. Treat your words of commitment to others with the utmost importance, so that even when you're dead tired, you persevere, because you can't stand the thought of having said **one** thing but having done **another**. If you live like that, first and foremost you'll please the Lord. But secondarily, you'll also earn the trust of the people around you. Your faithfulness will speak for itself.

We've seen in the Scripture that God is faithful. We can trust the Bible. Why? Because God wrote it and he's faithful. We can fully rely on every promise God has ever spoken to us. Why? Because the One who made the promise is reliable, dependable, and trustworthy. God is faithful, which is an enormous blessing to us. But I want to encourage you not to think of that as **just** a great blessing. It's also a great challenge, because God is our example, that we should follow in his steps. We're called to be **like** him. We're called to be as faithful as the God we love and serve is faithful.

Mt. 23:23 [Jesus speaking] "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

The Pharisees, according to Jesus, were guilty of straining out a gnat but swallowing a camel. In other words, they were intensely careful and super meticulous in matters that were important to them, but in other matters, even some matters that were of great importance to God, they were unconcerned. Every one of us needs to be on guard against falling into that trap. We need to love what God loves and hate what God hates. We need to embrace the priorities of **The Almighty**. When Jesus told the teachers of the law and the Pharisees that they had neglected faithfulness, he also identified faithfulness as a priority – calling it one of the "more important matters of the law." We would do well to consider it as important as Jesus did.

Rev. 2:10 [Jesus speaking to the church in Smyrna] Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Years ago at a Wednesday night Bible study, I quoted this verse, pointing out that we've been called to be faithful, even to the point of death. I'd been pondering what the best response might be if someone were to hold a gun to my head and say, "Deny Christ or die." I told the people that the best reply I could think of was to say, "Friend, if you pull that trigger, I'm going to be with Jesus. If you don't, I'm telling you that Jesus Christ is Lord." After the Bible study, a young man told me that if such a thing ever happened to him, he would deny Christ and then repent later. That, of course, is a really bad idea for several reasons, one of which is that Jesus said, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." But when it comes to the issue of faithfulness, God makes a clear point here of telling us that even death is not to come in the way of our being faithful.

Jsh. 24:14 [Joshua speaking to the Israelites] “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.

Rev. 13:10 If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

Pr. 20:6 Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find?

So the word of God makes it abundantly clear that we need to be faithful. We can become more and more faithful, because the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in our lives, and he will transform us into the people of faithfulness we have been destined to become as we submit to his working. On our outline, I've listed some areas of faithfulness I'd encourage you to consider: faithfulness to God, to your spouse if you're married, to family, to employers, to your financial obligations and more.

A son comes up to his father and says, “Dad, can we go fishing on Saturday?” The father says, “Sure, we can go fishing Saturday.” Friday night rolls around and the father gets a phone call from a friend who needs help with some equipment. So on Saturday he helps his friend and his son is devastated. We can all recognize that the father was not faithful to do what he said he would do, but why are stories like this so common? Is it because the father's value system says that fixing equipment is more important than going fishing? Is it because the father values adults as equals but children as less important? Whatever was motivating the father, if he had valued the words that came out of his mouth to his son as being so important that they could not go unfulfilled – which is how God views his words – that father would not have wronged his son.

A woman says to her misbehaving child, “If you do that again, I'm going to give you a spanking.” The child does it again, so the mother says, “If you do that again, I'm giving you a spanking, and this time I mean it.” The child does it again, so the mother says, “If you do that again, I'm giving you a spanking and this time I really mean it.” Now the child is very insecure because the mother has taught her child that her words cannot be trusted. Why did the mother make two idle threats? Was it because she just wanted to manipulate the child into behaving? Was it because she was so occupied with other responsibilities that she didn't want to deal with a misbehaving child? Whatever was motivating the mother, if she had understood that it's absolutely essential for her words to be full of integrity – which is how God uses his words – then she wouldn't have made the mistake of teaching her child twice that her words cannot be trusted.

So let's all learn to be faithful. Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. If we become people of great faithfulness, God will be pleased and the people around us will be blessed. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #10

The Remaining Fruit of the Spirit, Part 4: Gentleness

Gentleness is defined as: mild, tranquil, soft, tender; not harsh, rough, forceful, overbearing or domineering. From the original Greek word for gentleness, *πραυτης*, we get the meaning of power or strength under control. A person who had this quality would pardon injuries, correct their own faults, and rule their own spirit well.

Have you ever seen horses that are completely wild, untamed, and unbroken? Even though

animals like that are quite strong, they aren't useful. But if a patient and skillful trainer works with them for a few months, they can learn to accept a saddle, a bridle, and a rider. When the work is finished, these same horses can be of great benefit to those who own them. They're every bit as strong as they were when they were wild, even though now they would be so gentle that they could carry a child safely. This is a picture of what the ancient Greeks had in mind when they used this word. In today's culture, gentleness can be equated with weakness, but that's not the meaning here.

To me it's incredible that the God who's so powerful that his spoken word alone can cause entire galaxies to come into existence, the God who has all authority in heaven and on earth, the God who is the sustaining glue holding everything together – he, is gentle. To me, that's absolutely mind-boggling. It's not that he lacks power when he's being gentle, it's that he chooses to honor, respect, and accommodate those who are far less powerful than he is.

I once invited a guest minister who came and preached on boldness. Now I'm all for boldness when it's needed. The word of God is clear that he hasn't given us a spirit of timidity (II Timothy 1:7). When we're walking in righteousness and truth and those around us don't like that and they want to squelch our message, boldness is an important character trait to have. But if you're talking to the head of a crime ring with all his guards around him, talking boldly could get you killed. The guest preacher had some good things to say about boldness, but I had to write him and remind him that gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit, boldness is not. One of the evidences of God living in our hearts is that we will be gentle, because God is gentle. Courage and boldness are needed in the face of opposition. I'm quoting...

Ac. 4:29-31 [the apostles are praying] Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

These men needed boldness because they were being opposed by rulers who wanted to suppress their message. God filled them with his Spirit, and supplied them with what they needed in that situation. More often than not, however, gentleness should be manifested as an evidence that God is living inside of us. Let's turn to the Scripture to examine the gentleness of the Lord.

Mt. 12:20 [Matthew is here quoting Isaiah who had written prophetically about Jesus] A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory.

Things that are weak, things that are damaged, things that people would snuff out or discard as useless, Jesus cares about, and in tenderness he tries to bring them back to life.

Mt. 11:28-30 [Jesus speaking] “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Sin is a hard taskmaster, but Jesus provides refreshing for those who are downtrodden. He promises that if we come to him, take up his yoke and learn from him, we'll find the rest and renewal we'd been looking for. Why? Because he is gentle. Many years ago, I was a bit frustrated that it was so difficult for me to hear the Lord's voice because he was speaking quite softly to me. I finally cried out to the Lord, “God, why don't you just speak louder?” to which he replied, “Because I don't want to have to yell at you all the time.” God, in his goodness and in his gentleness, will at times speak softly to us. We benefit from his doing that because he is training our ears. Elijah had the spiritual sensitivity to hear the voice of God even when it was a gentle whisper. God would love for each of his sons and daughters to have that same finely-tuned 20/20 hearing.

Then in Isaiah 40, it says that the Sovereign LORD comes with power. What does this mighty, all-powerful God come to do? Verse 11 tells us. It says,

Is. 40:11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

Even in the flock, the Great Shepherd takes special care of the ewes nursing their lambs. Then, when Jesus came to the city of Jerusalem for the last time, Matthew records a prophecy written by Zechariah which says,

Mt. 21:5 "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

So we see the gentleness of the Lord over and over again in the Bible. Since God is incredibly gentle, we're also called to be gentle. The first Scripture given on the outline pertains especially to leaders in the church.

II Tim. 2:25-26 Those who oppose him [the Lord's servant] he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

In the world, opposition usually gets dealt with by being squashed. The world will tell you that unless you learn to swim with the sharks you'll never make it. After all, it's a dog-eat-dog world out there. The world will tell you to be aggressive, to stand up for your rights, to make your voice heard loudly, and to assert yourself. That's how you get ahead. God's way is very different. In God's family when leaders are opposed, they're supposed to instruct the opposers gently. Not only is gentleness required, but a redemptive attitude is required as well. The leaders should have the hope that God will yet bring the opposition around to a wholesome way of conducting themselves. But leaders are not the only members of God's family who're supposed to be gentle. As Paul writes to all the believers in Philippi,

Pp. 4:5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Col. 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

I Tim. 6:11 [Paul writing to Timothy] But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

Eph. 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Have you ever had someone run roughshod over you verbally? If so, I bet it didn't feel good. If they'd been gentle with you instead, I imagine the conversation would have ended much better. Certainly, you wouldn't have felt the need to protect yourself emotionally. Since we'd prefer being treated gently, let's remember that our Lord Jesus Christ told us that we're supposed to do to others what we would want them to do to us. We can excel in being gentle. The Holy Spirit will help us. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #10

The Remaining Fruit of the Spirit, Part 5: Self-control

Self-control is a quality that God does not need. He's perfect, so there's no need for him to control himself. But, graciously, he does, by the power of the Holy Spirit within us believers, help us to control the sinful, selfish passions and lusts that we have. Self-control simply means control of one's own emotions, desires, and actions. The word from the original Greek, *εγκρατεια*, was used to denote having power over oneself. It was used by the ancient Stoics to define a person who had the ability to restrain himself when tempted by evil pleasures. So it was considered a sign of human freedom.

People who lack self-control are slaves to their own desires. Hot fudge Sundaes do not make us eat. Cigarettes do not make us smoke. Alcohol does not make us get drunk. Tongues do not make us gossip. Guns do not make us kill people. Money does not make us spend. Obnoxious people do not make us get angry. Temptations do not make us sin. The truth is, we **choose** how to handle all the circumstances that come our way. God has created us to be free moral agents who get to decide what we will do with each situation we face. I've known some people who've viewed life with a victim mentality. They believe that all their deficiencies are someone else's fault. If they fall into sin they claim that the devil made them do it. Listen to me. The devil **does not have the power** to make you sin. He can tempt, he can suggest, he can lure, but he **cannot** force you to do anything. You choose. That's the way God has created you.

When God saved me at the age of 20, I was a very angry young man. I could even tell you **why** I was so angry – it was because of my upbringing and my ethnicity. As long as I cast the blame for my anger on those things my anger never got better. But the day I took responsibility for my anger, the day I got rid of all the excuses, the day I stopped blaming my upbringing and my ethnicity, the day I looked in the mirror and embraced the truth that the problem was me, that's the day I began to get set free from my anger problem. Please hear me. You **can** control yourself. That's what this fruit of the Spirit is all about. You **can** become more Christlike because the Holy Spirit lives inside of you. Please, get rid of all the excuses. Stop blaming people or circumstances for the way you are today. Embrace the truth that – if you're a believer in Jesus Christ – all the power you need to change is already resident within you by the Holy Spirit. If you have the vision and the passion to become more godly, if you ask **The Almighty** for help, he will transform you.

With that in mind, let's go to the Scripture.

Pr. 25:28

Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.

Picture an ancient city with broken-down walls. What impression does it make on you? Perhaps you feel like it looks shabby. Perhaps you're thinking that its inhabitants are lazy because they allowed it to get to such a state. Perhaps you're wondering if its lack of strength outwardly is just a symptom of its lack of resolve or lack of character inwardly. Perhaps it strikes you as **defenseless** from its enemies. God's word here compares such a city with broken-down walls to a man who lacks self-control. Such people are defenseless against much of the manipulation the world uses. The world tells them, "If it feels good, do it," so they follow along compliantly, like a beast led to the slaughter. The world tells them, "buy it now and pay for it later. Charge it, and make payments while you enjoy a higher standard of living," and they say, "OK. That sounds good," not realizing that they'll be paying much more by doing it that way. So if the world tells them, "Take care of #1," or "Everybody's doing it," or "You deserve a break today," they just blindly follow along, because their lack of self-control prevents them from evaluating what they're being told objectively, critically, and in the wisdom of God.

Tit. 2:11-12

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches

us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,

In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, a hobbit named Frodo has a ring with special powers. An older, wiser man named Gandalf tells Frodo that the more a person uses the ring, the more he becomes a slave to it. Frodo tells Gandalf that if he had warned him, he would have done away with the ring. To which Gandalf replies, “Would you? Try! Try now!” Frodo is unable to get rid of it. Gandalf laughs grimly. “You see? Already you cannot easily let it go, nor will to damage it.”

Our passions, like the ring held by Frodo, can be very hard to get rid of. Fortunately, we have a power, an inner strength, that Frodo did not have. We have the very creator of the universe, in the person of the Holy Spirit, within us to help us and strengthen us in doing the will of God. That's what Paul was referring to when he wrote to Titus, telling him that the grace of God teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives.

I Pt. 5:8-9 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Here Peter tells us that we need self-control because it's necessary in resisting the devil. On the night Jesus was betrayed, he told his followers that the prince of this world, the devil, was coming, but that he had no hold on him. In other words, there was absolutely nothing inside Jesus Christ that was loyal to the devil. In the days of Germany's Third Reich, Adolf Hitler had a select group of men known as the “third column.” These men lived and operated in foreign lands, but they were actually loyal to Hitler. We have to be careful not to have anything inside us, no “third column,” that is actually loyal to the devil or his agenda. Jesus was completely free from any such divided loyalty, and we can use the self-control that's available to us to overcome the passions, the tendencies in us that may actually be in line with the agenda from hell. As James has also instructed us, we must resist the devil and he will flee from us.

II Pt. 1:5-6a For this reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance;

Two verses later Peter says to his readers, “For if you possess these qualities in ***increasing measure***, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” I appreciate that Peter tells us that we ***can*** and ***need to*** have these qualities in increasing measure. We can have more self-control today than we did yesterday. We can have more self-control tomorrow than we do today. It's possible because the Holy Spirit is in us! God is in the life-transformation business, and because God is infinite, we can never exhaust the depths of what God has made available to us.

Peter tells us that we need to add perseverance to our self-control. In light of that, I want to talk briefly about fasting. You'll find many examples of fasting in the Bible, and Jesus himself has taught us that ***when*** we fast, not ***if*** we fast, we shouldn't make a show of it, like the hypocrites do. Biblically speaking, fasting is defined as abstaining from all food and drink except water. It certainly involves self-control, and it's a wonderful way of focusing on God more fully while temporarily doing away with things that have only physical value. Fasting is added to prayer so that our cry will better be heard on high. Fasting has a way of taking the wax out of our ears, the callouses off our hearts, and the scales off our eyes so that we can better hear, feel, and see spiritually. I invite you to study fasting in the Bible more fully. Also, the book God's Chosen Fast by Arthur Wallis, is an excellent resource.

Mt. 23:25 [Jesus speaking] “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.”

Self-indulgence is the opposite of self-control. We can indulge ourselves; we can cater to ourselves, or we can control ourselves, which is the **right** thing to do.

I Co. 9:24-27 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Do you remember who won the Stanley Cup in 1982? or the Super Bowl? or the World Series? or the NBA Championship that year? I certainly don't remember. What's my point? The athletes of this world go into very strict training. They're incredibly disciplined in teaching and preparing their bodies to do things that most of us are not even close to being able to do. But they exercise this extreme self-control for something which is fleeting, something that has value for only a very short time. In contrast, when we exercise self-control in becoming more Christlike, the outcome has **eternal** significance. It's not temporary. It's not fleeting. Peter says that our inheritance can **never** perish, spoil or fade. Our allowing the Holy Spirit to mold us and shape us into people of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control is eternal. So what we're doing is far, far, far more important than what those athletes are doing. They do what they do for the crowds and for the money. We do what we do for the creator of the universe, the one who has all power and all authority in heaven and on earth, the one who is worshiped and adored as holy, holy, holy, the greatest, most wonderful being in all of existence.

On our outline, it says that it's wonderful to exercise self-control, but it should never be the ultimate goal. We can, and need to, trust God to become so dead to self and so full of the Lord that self-control is not even needed. Let's never be satisfied until the work is **fully** done. If a man is in a tense verbal conflict with someone who is purposely agitating him, and even though this man feels like telling him off, he exercises self-control and walks away, and then the next day he walks into church, what does he say? What does he do? Does he tell the congregation how wonderfully God helped him exercise self-control? Think about it. Would you say that's a good response? I would say that it's a **good** response but it's an **incomplete** response. Yes, it's wonderful to acknowledge God's help in exercising self-control. But the man then also needs to cry out for God to change him. He needs to admit that he still had it in his heart to tell the other guy off. He needs to see the great gulf, the great disparity between God's heart and his heart and he needs to ask God fervently to transform him so that he'll be more like the Lord.

Hot water doesn't produce the cup of tea, it just brings out what's in the tea bag. What comes out of you or me when we're in hot water?? Fragrance is what comes out of a flower when it's trampled on. Are you a rose or a stinkweed? Let's not be satisfied until our hearts are pure. A church in our area once sent post card size invitations through the mail. On the front were 8 pictures of people. Four were "before" pictures and four were "after" pictures. But the "before" pictures were identical to the "after" pictures. The caption read, "Can you tell the difference?" The back of the card read, "That's because it's an inside job." God still transforms us on the inside!

Bill Johnson has said something very profound about self-control. I've put it on the outline. He said, "Self-control is not the ability to say no to a thousand other voices. It's the ability to say yes to the one voice so completely that there's nothing left to give to the other options."

In closing, I'd like to read from Matthew's gospel chapter 16, verses 24-27. It says,

Mt. 16:24-27 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself [which is very similar to control himself] and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man

give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

Amen. God bless you all.