

**Monday, May 23 - Read Galatians 5:16-23.** When the apostle Paul lived, there was a common belief that the phrase “do whatever you want” pretty much defined “the good life.” (Of course, some folks still believe that today.) Paul told the Galatian Christians that a truly good life results when we open ourselves to the presence of God’s Spirit. He listed nine vital qualities the Spirit produces in our lives. Paul was sad about the many ways humans miss the mark. (Review his examples in verses 19- 21, noting how he put fairly “respectable” items next to things like “orgies.”) He also distrusted self-righteous “goodness” (“all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse”—Galatians 3:10). What does his choice of the term “fruit” in 5:22 tell you about how the nine important Christian traits he listed grow in our lives? Which of the nine traits Paul said you get to have as a Christian do you find most present in your life? Which of them are you most eager for the Spirit’s power to grow more of in you? What is your part in nurturing a soul “climate” in which the fruit can grow?

**Tuesday, May 24 – Read John 3:14-21.** We find that the fruit the Spirit bears in our lives is all connected, that each area in which we grow helps us grow in other areas. John outlined the ways that receiving God’s love in turn shows itself more and more in our ability to love others. Then, he said, this love becomes a source of peace, a way we can quiet our fears “when our hearts condemn us.” Echoing the kind of life Jesus lived, John challenged his readers to fully live into the kind of life God offers: “Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” When have you experienced love that went beyond words into actions? In what ways do your unique temperament and gifts equip you to actively show love? In The Message verses 18-20 read, “Let’s live in real love. This is...the way to shut down debilitating self-criticism, even when there is something to it. For God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves.” In what ways can perfectionism spoil peace? How do you trust God’s grace more than your self-criticism?

**Wednesday, May 25 – Read Ephesians 4:1-6.** Methodist scholar Maxie Dunnam wrote of the key word “therefore,” “Paul has told that story of grace—the drama of salvation—and now can say ‘therefore.’ It is after we know that ‘by grace [we] have been saved’ (2:5) that we can be ‘worthy of our calling’ ... Our being and doing as Christians are expressions of what God in Christ has been and done for us.” Jesus told a story about God’s patience toward us, and our frequent lack of it with each other. In the story (Matthew 18:21-35), a king forgave a man who owed him a huge debt. Unmoved by the king’s patience, the man cruelly insisted on payment of a rather small debt someone owed him. What helps you grasp how patient God is with you? How can that awareness help grow your ability to be patient with others? In what big or small ways do you sense impatience hurting you, physically and mentally? Faced with a child’s energy, an elderly

person's slow pace, or a red light that lasts "too long," how can you allow the Holy Spirit to grow the fruit of patience in you?

**Thursday, May 26 – Read Ephesians 2:1-7.** In *All You Ever Wanted*, a small-group study on the fruit of the Spirit, Pastor Win Green noted that the Greek word for kindness "suggests 'usefulness' and 'employment'....It is not a word that simply communicates sentiment, but one that emphasizes utility." God's kindness is not just "nice feelings." It's active, supremely so when Jesus gave himself on the cross. At many points, the gospels show Jesus acting kindly out of his deep concern for hurting people (e.g. Luke 7:11-15, Matthew 9:36-38, Mark 8:1-8). How do these stories show, in everyday settings, God's "kindness to us in Christ Jesus"? How does today's passage expand the scope of that kindness to meet our most desperate spiritual need? Jesus said when we love our enemies, and bless those who curse us, then "you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:35-36). As a child, did you see God mainly as kind and merciful, or angry and punitive? What helps you trust God's kindness now?

**Friday, May 27 – Read Matthew 20:1-16.** Many Bible translations use "goodness" in Galatians 5:22 for the Greek word *agathos*. That's not wrong, but Matthew also used the word in this story for the master's generous pay plan. Even today, if we say "You're so good to me," we usually, in some way, mean "generous." Our only "deserving" of eternal life comes from God's generous goodness, God's great love for us. Does the master's way of paying the workers in this story feel unfair to you? "It was not unfair, of course. No one was underpaid; it was just that some received 'unreasonable' generosity. That is what the kingdom of heaven is like." (New Bible Commentary) In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul said Christ was treated as we deserved, and we are treated as he deserved. In what ways does that "unfair" exchange draw your heart toward Christ? Jesus also described God's generosity by saying "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). When has God's grace, his lavish generosity, most amazed and encouraged you?

**Saturday, May 28 – Read Philippians 4:1-5, Galatians 6:1-2.** *Praus*, the Greek word Paul used for "gentleness" did not mean "weakness" in any sense. It was used to describe, for instance, a powerful horse that had been "gentled" so his strength blessed people rather than hurting them. Paul seemed particularly concerned that this quality show itself at the times when people disagreed, or needed to correct another person. Scholar William Barclay wrote of *praus* that "There is gentleness in *praus*, but behind the gentleness is the strength of steel...It is not a spineless gentleness." Does it take greater inner strength to be gentle or to lash out and hurt those who frustrate you? When have you experienced this kind of gentleness in yourself or someone else? Philippians 4:5 in

the Common English Bible reads, “Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people.” Sarah Parsons wrote that “when developing a disciplined practice, one of the most valuable gifts we can give ourselves is gentleness.” How can you include yourself among the “all people” to whom you show gentleness.

**Sunday, May 29 – Read Galatians 5:1, 13-14, 22-23.** God’s call to a life of freedom was the spacious frame in which the apostle set the picture of the fruit of the Spirit. We could respond to a study of the Spirit’s fruit by saying things like, “I’ve just gotta be more loving” or “I have to get a handle on self-control.” But that just turns this into one more heavy burden of guilt for us to carry. The fruit of the Holy Spirit brings us, not more burdens, but freedom to live fully, because “against such things there is no law.” Savor once more the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” In what ways have you seen one or more of these traits bring you greater freedom as the Spirit grows it in your life? What steps do you want to take during the rest of 2016 to cultivate the soil of your life so that the Spirit’s fruit can grow more deeply, and bring you even more God-given freedom?