

Pathway

PERSONAL CHRISTIAN GROWTH SERIES

Set aside a special time each day to go through a *Pathway* study. Even if you miss a day or two, don't skip those studies. Begin again where you left off! Each daily study is designed to take only 10-12 minutes, or longer ... it's up to you! Be honest with yourself. This is a private time just between you and God.

Introduction — *Fruit of the Spirit*

Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance — how are you doing in these areas? What kind of fruit is growing in your heart? Is it pleasing to the Lord, and to others around you? Or, would your fruit be more properly labeled as sour? This *Pathway* series gives you practical help on how to make these positive attributes real in your everyday living.

DAY ONE — Fruit of the Spirit

Hiding It in My Heart: Before you study the individual characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit, memorize Galatians 5:22-23 where they are listed.

Talk to God: Tell God about the qualities where you rated low. Ask Him to help you develop those aspects of your Christian character as you study the fruit of the Spirit this week.

Verse to Think About: John 15:4

Growing a Bumper Crop

Let's try a word association. When someone mentions the word character, what comes to your mind?

Perhaps you thought of a description such as: "She has character," meaning someone who is honest, is respected and is not superficial. Or "he's a real character," referring to a person who clowns around, is known for pranks or stands out in an unusual way.

But have you ever thought of how God wants your character to be? Galatians 5:22-23 says: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering [patience], gentleness [kindness], goodness, faith [faithfulness], meekness [gentleness], temperance [self-control]: against such there is no law.* These nine qualities summarize the kind of character God wants His children to develop.

To see what kind of character you have, rate yourself on the following items. In the space by each aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, rate yourself from 1 to 10 to indicate how much of it is ripe in your life. Ten equals a bumper crop; one means it's barely present.

___ Love: I give of myself and what I have to other people, even if they don't deserve it ...

___ Joy: I am cheerful and pleasant, even when everything is going wrong ...

___ Peace: I remain calm instead of worrying when faced with problems and hard times ...

___ Patience: I can wait in difficult and irritating situations without complaining or getting angry ...

___ Kindness: I'm concerned about other people instead of thinking only of myself ...

___ Goodness: I regularly do good deeds for other people ...

___ Faithfulness: I am dependable and trustworthy ...

___ Gentleness: I am humble and submissive to God instead of being proud, rough and revengeful ...

___ Self-control: I am basically a disciplined person. (For example, I don't waste a lot of time, frequently lose my temper, overeat or use harmful substances.)

How well did you do? Total: _____

If your ratings were low, don't despair. There is hope for increasing your fruit crop. If they were high, don't get overconfident. You can be even more fruitful.

A Look in the Book: God outlines in His Word some conditions for growing a bumper crop of this fruit (or character). **Read John 15:1-10.**

Here, Jesus compares our relationship with Him to branches on a vine. Jesus is the vine, Christians are the branches, and God is the gardener.

According to this passage, what makes a person able to grow spiritual fruit?

How does a person show that he belongs to God?

How does a branch, or believer, bear fruit?

The responsibility for developing spiritual fruit is both God's and ours. We cannot develop it on our own. We need the Lord's continual help!

DAY TWO — Fruit of the Spirit

Talk to God: Ask God to help you love other people the way He loves you — with actions, not just words.

Verse to Think About: 1 John 3:18.

Love

What kinds of different meanings do you attach to the word love?

For example, you might say, “I love pizza.” But you don’t mean the same kind of love as when you say, “I love Grandma.” **Now try to think of several other meanings.**

Write them below.

Contrary to what many think, love is an action, not a feeling. It is the unselfish giving of yourself and your best to help others, whether or not they deserve it or even respond to it.

How can you show this kind of love today? Write one specific way.

A Look in the Book: When Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, he mentioned love first. This is probably because love includes the character qualities that follow. Without love, the rest are ineffective.

Read the following verses. Write one fact from each describing God’s love for us.

Jeremiah 31:3: _____

John 3:16: _____

Ephesians 2:4-5: _____

1 John 3:16: _____

Another way to define love is the following paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 13.

1. Though I speak with complimentary words and have not love, I am become as a fire alarm or an annoying car horn.
2. And though I have the ability to give good speeches, and though I get straight A’s and have not love, I am nothing.
3. And though I volunteer to help my church’s senior citizens, and have not love, it profits me nothing.
4. Love helps me be patient with obnoxious classmates, and is kind to visitors in Sunday School or youth group; love is not envious of my friends’ clothes or cars; love does not boast of making first string on the football team; is not proud of winning a school election.
5. Does not cut into the cafeteria line, does not blow up when my younger sister or brother takes something without asking;
6. Does not delight when someone is caught cheating or with drugs, but is happy when I notice a classmate doing what is right;
7. Is loyal to my friends even when we disagree, gives everyone the benefit of the doubt, expects the best from my parents, continues to spend time with classmates, even though they make fun of my beliefs.
8. Love never gives up.



DAY THREE — Fruit of the Spirit

Talk to God: Talk to the Lord about what has been taking away your joy and peace; then commit those situations to Him. Ask God to help you focus on Him instead of circumstances around you.

Verses to Think About: Isaiah 26:3; Psalm 16:11.

Joy and Peace

Read the following and be prepared to give your reactions:

A week of rainy days.

Friends who are too busy to spend time with you.

Receiving birthday presents you don't like and don't want.

Waking up with the flu on the day you're to be inducted into the honor society.

Losing the student council election.

Finding out your parents are getting a divorce.

Being fired from your part-time job.

Being unfairly criticized.

Not having a date on Friday night when all your friends do.

Breaking curfew and facing angry parents who are waiting up for you.

These are only a few examples of joy and peace snatchers. List some others on the lines below. What keeps you from being peaceful and joyful.

Joy and peace which stem from circumstances are not lasting. But God says you should have joy and peace in spite of hassles and less-than-ideal situations. Joy and peace are two characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit which God wants to grow in your life.

A Look in the Book: That character quality of joy refers to a permanent delight in God that does not rely on outward circumstances. It is not to be confused with happiness, which depends on agreeable circumstances. Peace, the partner of joy, is mental and

emotional calmness in the midst of chaos. It is the result of a right relationship with God through faith in Christ (Romans 5:1).

Joy and peace grow best in unfavorable circumstances. The Apostle Paul had a lot of experience with those kinds of situations. When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, one of the things he emphasized was joy, in spite of the fact that he was experiencing one of his worst predicaments. He was a prisoner in Rome, chained to guards 24 hours a day. He faced a trial that could result in a death sentence. But Paul was rejoicing in it all!

Read Philippians 4:4-9.

How can you have joy when everything is going wrong?

What is one way you can practice the command in verse 4 today?

How can you experience peace in the midst of situations that normally cause you to worry?

What worries do you need to talk to God about so you can enjoy His peace?



DAY FOUR — Fruit of the Spirit

Hiding It in My Heart: Although it's easy to become impatient and give up, Paul encourages us in Galatians 6:9 to keep going. Memorize this verse today as a reminder to be patient and faithful in serving the Lord.

Talk to God: Ask God to help you follow through on strengthening one of these aspects you studied today of the fruit of the Spirit. Ask Him to help you become more faithful and patient.

Verses to Think About: 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Luke 16:10.

Long-suffering and Faith

Welcome to another teen edition of the "Waiting Game."

The first contestant is Pete, a junior. His favorite subject is computer science. When he's not in school or doing homework, Pete likes to work on cars and play basketball. He's a member of the South Church teen group and plans to be a computer programmer.

The second contestant is Julie, a senior. She likes English class best and enjoys working with children. Julie has helped in her church's vacation Bible school and Awana Clubs the past two years. She hopes to be an elementary school teacher.

Roger is the third contestant. He's a freshman member of his school's track team. When he's not training or competing, he likes to read and cross-country ski. After college, Roger wants to coach and teach Physical Education. He also attends South Church.

All three of these contestants hate waiting. But they do a lot of it. Pete is putting in time until he finishes school so he can get a good job. He's just getting by in most of his classes, although his teachers say he has a great deal of potential. Whenever Pete feels pressured to do better, he threatens to quit school. Pete has flunked the "Waiting Game."

Julie has been accepted at a Christian liberal arts college, which costs more than her parents can afford. She applied for a scholarship, but so far has not been notified about the results. Each day Julie has to wait, she gets more anxious. Julie has flunked the "Waiting Game."

Roger hates to be late. He has no patience with people who show up even five minutes late. Every minute counts for Roger. He has his books packed a few minutes before the bell rings. He cannot tolerate teachers who keep on talking when it's time to leave. Roger, too, has flunked the "Waiting Game."

Most Christians, if they are honest, would have to admit they are not good at waiting. But God encourages — and commands — long-suffering and faith while waiting for Him or other people to act.

A Look in the Book: Long-suffering and faith are two aspects of the fruit of the Spirit that are extremely difficult to develop. Long-suffering (patience) means willingness to wait, without complaining, especially in difficult or irritating, situations. Faith (faithfulness) refers to dependability and trustworthiness in all situations and with everything God has given us.

How do you think long-suffering (patience) and faith (faithfulness) are related?

Read Romans 5:3 and James 1:2-3

How do you learn to be patient? _____

Nobody has to pray for trials in order to develop patience. We encounter more than enough to grow a bumper crop! The problem is that most Christians keep trying to avoid the hard times instead of faithfully following God in them.

Look at the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30.

Describe the principle about faithfulness that Jesus taught in this story.

Which of these two character qualities, long-suffering (patience) or faith (faithfulness), is your weakness?

How can you work with God to strengthen this area? Name one practical step you can take today.



DAY FIVE — Fruit of the Spirit

Talk to God: If it's difficult for you to be kind to certain people, tell God how you feel. Ask Him to give you an unselfish concern for others. Also ask Him to show you good deeds you can do for other people and to help you do them.

Verse to Think About: Galatians 6:10.

Gentleness and Goodness

Your history teacher announces that the class will be working in groups for the next few weeks. She appoints you as one of the group leaders and tells everyone to form groups of five. Quickly three of your friends join you. You look around the room for a fifth member and notice that Jan, who has a reputation for being lazy, hasn't been asked to join a group.

What will you do? _____

What should you do? _____

Your mom asks you to baby-sit your younger brother and sister tonight so she can visit a sick friend. You had planned to go to the mall with your friends. When you tell Mom that you won't be home, she asks you to either change your plans or take the kids with you.

What will you do? _____

What should you do? _____

Steve has just started attending your Sunday School class. None of the regulars like him, so no one talks to him except your teacher.

What will you do? _____

What should you do? _____

Opportunities for demonstrating gentleness (kindness) and goodness (good deeds) are all around you. The problem is that most people usually don't want to get involved with those who need help the most. But these two characteristics of spiritual fruit, gentleness (kindness) and goodness (good deeds), thrive in situations like the ones described above.

A Look in the Book: In Galatians 5:22, the word gentleness can be translated kindness. It means unselfish concern for someone who doesn't deserve it. The next trait, goodness, is kindness in action. It refers to good deeds which stem from a good heart, that is, a heart right with God.

Grab your Bible and read 2 Samuel 9. Then write how David showed gentleness (kindness) and goodness (good deeds) to Mephibosheth.

Now read Luke 10:29-37. How did the Samaritan show gentleness (kindness) and goodness (good deeds) to the man who was attacked by thieves?

How can you follow the examples of David and the Samaritan today? Think of someone who doesn't necessarily deserve your gentleness (kindness) and goodness (good deeds).

Write that person's name here.

What specific good deed will you do for him or her as proof of your concern?

When will you do it? _____

On My Own: Talk to your youth director, pastor or Sunday School teacher. Ask him or her to name some groups or individuals in your church or community who need to have gentleness (kindness) shown to them. Also ask for specific suggestions of how you can help those people. Choose a group or person and begin to plan your assistance. Decide if you should involve your youth group or Sunday School class. If so, find out how to present this challenge to the group. Ask the adult you talk with to pray for you and support you as needed. Finally, make an appointment to report your progress to him or her.

DAY SIX — Fruit of the Spirit

Talk to God: Talk to God about the decision you made to grow more of the fruit of meekness (gentleness) or temperance (self-control). Tell Him you are depending on Him, instead of your own resources, to accomplish your goal.

Verse to Think About: Psalm 25:9.

Meekness and Temperance

Like most youth groups, the one at First Church has its “outstanding” members. They are not necessarily the teens who are known for their godly lifestyles. Instead, they are distinguished for other prominent traits.

Note Joey, for example. He thinks he’s God’s gift to the youth department. He knows all the answers to his teacher’s questions and dominates class discussions. He always wins the Bible quiz contests. He’s the first to volunteer for service projects, not out of concern for people or a strong desire to serve the Lord, but to protect his image as a “good Christian teen.”

When anyone confronts Joey about his attitude, he gets defensive and quotes Scripture to justify himself. Nobody can out-argue him, even when he’s wrong (which, according to Joey, is almost never).

Susanne, another “outstanding” member, is famous for her temper. She explodes at least once a Sunday, although she doesn’t stay mad for long.

Susanne also has a reputation for being late — and always having a dozen excuses. At the last retreat, she stayed up half the night getting ready for the next day’s skit. Then, in the morning, she turned off her alarm and slept through the Bible study. She complained the whole day about having too much to do. But she managed to go horseback riding for an hour and to instigate an elaborate prank on a sponsor.

“I just can’t help myself,” is her favorite expression. She uses it to explain everything from pigging out on chocolate chip cookies to skipping piano practice to not completing her homework on time.

Susanne and Joey are walking ads for lack of temperance (self-control) and meekness (gentleness). Unfortunately, they are not the only ones.

A Look in the Book: In Paul’s description of the fruit of the Spirit, the quality of meekness may be better understood as gentleness. Meekness is power under control, submission to God, courage and strength. It is not weakness. The last quality, temperance, means self-control or discipline, a highly-valued trait in God’s eyes.

Abraham showed meekness (gentleness) and temperance (self-control) in his dealings with Lot. **Read Genesis 13:5-9.**

Who took the initiative in seeking a resolution to the problem? What did Abraham offer to do?

How does Abraham’s attitude toward Lot exemplify meekness (gentleness) and temperance (self-control)?

In what areas of your life do you need to practice meekness (gentleness) and/or temperance (self-control)?

What will you do today to begin to cultivate more of one or both of these character qualities? Be specific and practical. For example: I will exercise more temperance (self-control) by not spending a lot of time alone in the car with my boyfriend or girlfriend.

Don’t forget! You can’t grow these qualities on your own. You need to depend on God to help you.