

Daily Devotional

Booklet



we focus on
LIFE

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LOVE : WHAT LOVING OURSELVES LOOKS LIKE

Galatians 5:13-26 is very well-known passage about the Fruit of the Spirit. Paul speaks to the Jesus followers in Galatia about how to live this new life of freedom in Christ. He explains that they are no longer under the law but have freedom because of the Grace of God. He then goes on to say that this freedom doesn't mean that we give ourselves over to any and all sinful, destructive behaviour, but rather we give ourselves over to the Holy Spirit. He shows us that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are fruit that we often speak about in the Church.

However, we mostly speak about them as the way we treat others. That when we surrender to the Holy Spirit, we will be more patient, loving, kind, gentle etc. to those around us. What if we were to say that we should also be treating ourselves in these ways? The fruit of the Spirit is not meant to be a list of instructions, but rather a condition of the heart. If these Fruit are then a condition of the heart it means that we would be able to treat ourselves in these ways as well. Yet, so often we don't treat ourselves with love, patience, kindness or gentleness. Rather we have a critical inner voice that constantly pushes us to be more, do more, or improve. To the point that this drives us to a state of self-loathing. That inner voice that is often critical and self-loathing has the potential to cause a lot of damage in our lives. It causes toxic thoughts, which lead to toxic behaviours which then increase the thoughts of disappointment and self-loathing. This is not the freedom that God desires for us.

Over the next few weeks, we will be exploring the Fruit of the Spirit from a mental health perspective. In other words, do I love myself, how do I love myself? Am I patient with myself, or kind to myself? We pray that this journey would lead us all towards a life of peace.

Prayer: Loving Father, would you help us on this journey of love

LOVE: SELF-LOVE IS IMPORTANT

For many years I viewed self-love through a negative lens and equated it with selfishness and egotism. I held tightly to the teachings of self-denial, of serving others and of picking up our cross to follow Christ and wrongly believed that loving yourself contradicted these virtues. The truth is, self-love does not stop us from serving others or picking up our cross, it actually enables us to! Loving ourselves is biblical. In Proverbs 19:8 we are reminded that, *"To acquire wisdom is to love yourself..."* Self-love is wise because a lack of it leads to self-sabotaging behaviour, poor decision making and a self-limiting world view. It is for this reason that a lack of self-love is seen as the root of all sorts of issues ranging from depression to bullying, suicide and obesity. Charlie chapman equates self-love with freedom... *"As I began to love myself, I freed myself of anything that is no good for my health – food, people, things, situations, and everything that drew me down and away from myself..."*.

When we live with discontent, hatred, and disdain towards ourselves we live a life burdened with the wight of shame and insecurity and we rob ourselves from living the abundant life Jesus intended us to live. We rob ourselves from achieving all He ordained for us to achieve. We rob ourselves from walking the unique path he created for us to walk. How can we carry our cross if our arms are already full carrying the burden of shame and insecurity? How can we serve others and place others needs above our own if we are constantly thinking about our shortfalls, failures, and inabilities? How can we truly love the other if we do not love ourselves? To liberate ourselves to fully follow Christ we must do the brave work of the soul and choose to love, accept, and even celebrate ourselves. We must adopt the same view of ourselves as Christ has of us.

May we know today that God believes we are worthy of love to the point of death! May we know that God takes great delight in us and that He rejoices over us with singing! May we choose to see ourselves the same way.

Prayer: Lord God, help me to see myself the way you see me.

The entire bible can be summed up in the greatest commandment that Jesus gives us in Matthew 22:37-40, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and ...Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*" One thing that has always struck me about this commandment is the phrase, "as yourself". For many Christians loving God and loving our neighbour makes sense and comes naturally, but Jesus very specifically added, "as yourself". This statement alludes to the fact that until we learn to love ourselves, we can never fully love those around us! I am reminded of the safety protocols we are given when traveling on an aeroplane. The very clear instruction is: In the case of emergency, secure your oxygen mask on yourself before attempting to help the vulnerable around you. If we do not first take care of ourselves, our ability to care for those around us is compromised. If we do not first love ourselves, our ability to love and be loved by those around us is compromised! When we live with self-loathing and believe we are unlovable it is impossible to truly receive love from others, we will constantly mistrust their intentions, doubt their actions, and question their words.

This ultimately places incredible strain on the relationship! When we live with self-loathing, we often begin to develop a victim mentality, because if we do not believe we are worthy of love we inherently start to believe that the rest of the world feels the same about us! When we live with this victim mentality, we start to subconsciously treat those around us as the villain, this too places strain on our relationships! For us to truly love those around us, we must learn to love ourselves! Paul gives us a picture of what this kind of love practically looks like in 1 Corinthians 13. May we choose to be patient, kind and honouring of ourselves. May we be slow to anger and keep no record of our wrongs. May we love ourselves so that we are set free to love others.

Prayer: Father, help me love me so that I can love others better.

One of the greatest threats self-loathing poses is on our relationship with the Father. Jesus did an incredible work on the cross by defeating death and washing us clean from the sin and pain of our past. On the cross He demonstrated His love for us and made a way back to Himself. Because of the cross, a relationship with him is possible! Isaiah 43:25 gives us a beautiful picture of what Jesus accomplished, "*I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins*". The trouble with Self-loathing is that we hold on to all our brokenness and live with the belief that we are not worthy of His gift and His love, so, even though God has made a way back to Himself, we choose not to walk down it out of shame! I often think about the prodigal son. He too made mistakes, he too had reason to doubt his worth and to disbelieve his fathers love for him, after all, he did choose to walk away! He believed that he had burnt his bridges and that because of his past he was no longer worthy to be called a son, so the only way he could go back home was as a hired hand! On his journey home he rehearses a speech, 'Father, I'm no longer worthy to be your son, please take me on as a servant'. You can imagine his surprise when he gets home and see's his father running towards him, embracing him, and restoring him as a son! I often wonder, if the son knew what his father's reaction would be, would he have chosen to come home sooner? To truly receive the gift of the cross, to truly receive our fathers love, we must first choose to believe that we are worthy of it.

The truth is, apart from the grace of God every person who walks this earth is not worthy of it, but on the Cross, God made us worthy! "Agape doesn't love somebody because they're worthy. Agape makes them worthy by the strength and power of its love. Agape loves in such a way that it makes them beautiful." — Rob Bell. His love cannot be earned, deserved, or achieved; it can only be received. May we love ourselves enough to receive it.

Prayer: Thank-you Lord for making me worthy!

Romans 12:2 says "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." What a beautiful passage, it shows us how to discover God's will for our lives. The key to discovering God's will is through the renewing of our minds. I wonder, how do we renew our minds so that we can love ourselves more? Perhaps the first way is to recognize the different inner voices that we listen to. Many of us have an inner voice that tells us how we have fallen short, we have a critical inner voice that tells us we are unworthy or unforgiven. We have a critical inner voice that tells us the ways in which we are not enough. I'm not sure if any of you have ever heard this voice, the one that says, you are too fat, too lazy, too guilty, too innocent. It's the voice that leads to a life of striving and shame rather than freedom and love. The first step to renewing our minds is to recognize that inner critical voice for what it is, destructive.

The second step is then to silence that voice. None of us are perfect, we have all fallen short and we are all sinful and broken. Jesus encountered people who were broken and sinful all the time. The way that Jesus dealt with these people was not to break them down further, but rather to accept them and love them in their brokenness. That love and acceptance is transformative and their lives were changed. Love and acceptance is a far more powerful agent of transformation than criticism and rejection. Therefore, that voice that breaks us down is not transformative, it is simply destructive and so should be silenced.

Finally, listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit which speaks of love. The Holy Spirit is the divine Counsellor and comforter.

Prayer: Gracious Father, please forgive us for the times we listen to the voice that destroys, rather than the voice that gives life. May we recognize Your voice of love. In Jesus name, Amen

John 4 is one of the most incredible descriptions of the love of God. It reminds us of the loving nature of God and the way that God loves us. Sometimes, we forget that God is love and that God actually cares about how we are doing.

The other day I went on a retreat for the first time in years. When I drove to the retreat, I had this overwhelming sense that I had so many other things I needed to do and I was being irresponsible with my time. On the retreat there was a moment of meditation. During the meditation the guide asked the question of 'why did God want you here today'. I was filled with an overwhelming sense that I was suddenly exactly where God wanted me. I realised God wanted me there because I needed it and God cares about how I am doing. I realised God cares more about how I am doing, than about what I am doing.

God doesn't long for us to have a life that is burn out, depressed, anxious, over worked, exhausted or lonely. God longs for us to be ok, God longs for us to be more than ok, God longs for us to find freedom, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and gentleness. God longs for us to find these things even when our external lives are falling apart, even when we face death or destruction or persecution or hardships, these are the desires that God has for our souls.

God not only desires these for our souls, but God provides them as well. Through connection with the Holy Spirit these are the fruit we will discover. Spend some time today reflecting on these words from Isaiah 43, but perhaps insert your name into these words and hear what God says to you: "(Your name), you are precious and honoured in my sight because I love you."

Prayer: Loving Father, thank You that You are love and that Your love is everlasting. May we take the time to allow You to love us. In Jesus name, Amen.

Fruits of the Spirit

Love

Welcome: Have you ever experienced unconditional love from someone else? What did it do for you?

Worship: **One thing remains- Jesus culture**

https://youtu.be/6_KXsMCJgBQ

Word: Matt 22:37-40. Isaiah 43:4 , 1 Cor 13:1-8, John 4

Questions:

Why do you think self-love is important?

How do you think loving ourselves liberates us to love others more fully?

What thoughts/Feelings come to mind when you reflect on the fact that God has made you worthy of his love? What is stopping you from fully believing that you are worthy?

What thoughts that you think about yourself are in need of transformation?

Work: Spend some time reflecting on Isaiah 43:4:

“(Your name), you are precious and honoured in my sight because I love you.”

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT
JOY

week 2 : day 1

Reading: Galatians 5:22-23 MSG

“But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.”

Finding Joy in a time of hardship, grief, despair is not the easiest of tasks! I am reminded of this quote that our friend Trevor Hudson has shared with us many times: “Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult—once we truly understand and accept it—then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.” — M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled: A New Psychology of Love*,

Joy offers a similar response! Once we understand Joy, then it is no longer difficult to notice and acknowledge the presence of Joy, regardless of the valley we find ourselves in. This Joy gives us a glimpse of what it means to live a “Christ Like” life.

Friend, where do you find yourself today? Are you living life joyfully or joyless? Can I invite you to hold these words of the Psalmist in 94:19
“When I am filled with cares, Your comfort brings me joy.”

Prayer: O God who walks with me through this day. My Soul longs to sing out with Joy at the wonder and mercy found in a relationship with you. You our my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the lover of my Soul.
Amen

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT
JOY

week 2 : day 2

Reading: Psalm 4:7

“Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound.”

In Sunday School these words were engraved into my heart. Did you have a similar experience?

**I have the joy, joy, joy, joy,
Down in my heart, (where?)
Down in my heart, (where?)
Down in my heart,
I have the joy, joy, joy, joy,
Down in my heart, (where?)
Down in my heart to stay.**

What power there we find in the lyrics of this song! Joy is deep down in our heart! The difficulty so many of us face today, is that we struggle to move from the busyness of our minds to the truths that are tucked away deep within our heart and soul.

Joy as a fruit of the Spirit is the opposite of discouragement. It is so much more than happiness. The Psalmist, in the midst of hardship, is pointing us to God. He is comparing his Joy to more than that of an abundant Harvest of Grain and Wine. The Joy of the Spirit is so much more.

Friend, today as you share in this devotion, are you also longing for the abundant Joy offered to you and I. This Joy that saturates every circumstance, relationship, and earthly experience? Here is the Good News! Through the Spirit of God we are able to live with this Great Joy.

Prayer: God our Father, today we open our lives to the Spirit of God to fill us with joy, joy, joy down in our hearts. Amen

Reading: Psalm 30:4-5

“Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment, and his favour is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”

Our mental health is of great concern during this pandemic and beyond. We have all experienced some loss, pain, grief and hardship! The economy has excluded so many people and we are living in a time of rumours, corruption, and anxiety. Still in all of this we are asked to walk with the Fruit of the Spirit “Joy.” Joy may seem so incompatible to many of us, at the moment, and yet joy is what we are called to exhibit.

You see, joy is not the same as happiness. Joy is to trust that God is in control, and is the understanding that things are okay, despite the circumstances. Happiness is what “happens” to us, and joy is an underlying contentment that we live in when we trust in Christ. Living life, at the moment is filled, with uncertainty, whether you are concerned about your job, your faith, your ability to protect those you love, where you are going to live, the health of a family member, or the vast number of other difficulties that we may face in a given day. It is difficult to look at anyone going through these kinds of troubles and simply say, “Trust God.”

But friends, while that message is simple, it is also the ONLY thing that can be said. When situations are beyond our control or understanding, and when we can't provide the fix, the only thing left sustaining us is that trust. Joy is not the absence of difficulty, it is the trust that God is big enough to handle what we are facing.

Prayer: O God of Joy, you are our sustainer through times of difficulty. It is in you we place our trust, because you are so much Bigger than anything we are facing now. Amen.

Reading: Nehemiah 8:10

"For the joy of the LORD is your strength,"

At a Northfield Men's fellowship early on a Saturday morning, I was struck by the words of Rick Warren, the Senior Pastor of Saddleback church in the USA. He gave a description of Joy as follows:

"Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright and the determined choice to praise God in every situation."

Two themes stand out for me:

1. "quiet confidence"
2. "determined choice."

Friends, offering praise and thanksgiving to God cultivates this deep sense of Joy, and when we are able to do this on a daily basis we will begin to acknowledge that God is in control day by day, minute by minute.

This is resting in the Fruit of Joy! Leaving our burdens with the one who is in control of it all. Friends, nothing can take away our Joy "So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy." (John 16:22)

Joy is of eternal value and everlasting. This is the Joy that you and I want, the kind of joy that is rooted so deeply in our heart that nothing can cause it to waver.

Prayer: Father God, the Joy found in you is everlasting! You are my strength! Amen

Reading: John 15:11

“ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

Have you in the last day, week, month said these words “if only....”?
A common mistake we make is to think that getting something will make us happy.

But joy and happiness is achieved by more giving and serving than from getting. Paul reminds us that Jesus Christ spoke into this he says in Acts 20:35 "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving"

To grow in joy, we must resist not only self-pity but also becoming self-centered and self-absorbed. Friends, for joy to flourish, we have to focus on loving others and especially on loving, adoring and praising God.

Joy's DNA is made up of lots of gratitude—gratitude for the love, mercy and grace that is offered to us. The things God has done for us and His "exceedingly great and precious promises" for our future (2 Peter 1:4). Gratitude produces joy (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). And our gratitude should be for others blessings as well as for our own (Romans 12:15).

Can we today, practice to add gratitude, humility, forgiveness, faith, hope, patience and love to our lives and remove resentment, anger, fear, worry, materialism, greed, jealousy, complaining and pride, and allow the Spirit of God to share with us the Fruit of Joy!

Prayer: Holy Spirit of God. Will you be my encourager today, helping me to let go of resentment, fear, anger and worry and embrace gratitude for the sake of my life and for the Kingdom of God. Amen

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT
JOY

week 2 : day 6

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:4-6

"For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. "

Beautiful Joy is God's character! We can notice it all around us,, just look at God's creation—birds singing, flowers blooming, and the sun shining! Many of us, if we just took a moment to stop and look at the beauty around is would carry less of a burden. God "gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17).

Since God is exceedingly joyful, we as his beloved sons and daughters should also be joyful! The gospel according to Luke reminds us of this Joy that the followers of Jesus had because of the work of the Holy Spirit." And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:52).

Friends, are you and I filled with this same joy as those who follow Christ? We are able to rise above the trials and tribulations we are currently experiencing because the Joy deep down in our hearts is because Christ lives in us. He tells us to rejoice because our names are written in heaven. The Psalmist in 43:4 calls "God my exceeding joy." and in His presence "is fullness of joy" Psalms 16:11.

God's Spirit is a tree of life, producing life-giving fruit and that fruit includes great joy.

Prayer: Jesus Christ you teach us to ask, and we will receive, that our joy may be full!" Amen

Fruit of the Spirit - Joy

Group Notes

Welcome:

Share a moment from this week where you have been felt Joyful and joyless.

Worship:

"Joy" from Rend Collective (OFFICIAL LYRIC VIDEO) - YouTube

Prayer:

God, whose love restores the broken hearted of this world: pour out your love, we beseech you, upon those who feel lonely, abandoned, or unloved. Strengthen their hope to meet the days ahead; give them the courage to form life-giving friendships; and bless them with the joy Amen.

Word: James 1:2 (NIV) and Psalms 30:5 (NLT) and Galatians 5:22-23 MSG

Questions:

Why do you think God tells you that His joy is what acts as your strength during trying times? Can you think of a time when His joy kept you strong? When things are going well for you, do you act happy and content? What if things are not going the way you think that they should be, do you start to lose your faith and act negatively?

What can you do today to begin cultivating Joy in your life?

Work: Spend this week asking the Spirit of God to help you acknowledge the Joy in your heart. Even in the midst of struggle.

Read Genesis 1: 1 – 2

When you read the first story of creation from the bible, it is very clear that creation was not at peace from the beginning. In other words, creation was not complete because God's presence was not fully realised. As we begin this week in celebration of 'PEACE' as one of the fruits of the spirit we witness in Galatians 5:22-23 – it is important that we can pause and look into the Old Testament on how God enacted 'PEACE' to His creation.

From reading the story of creation from Genesis 1: 1-2, it is uncontested that, in the world there was no peace to the existed formless earth. Then, upon the presence of God to the formless earth through His powerful Word" And God said, let there be light, and there was light". Peace is a state of being filled with wholeness. In other words, to have an assurance or/and witness about God's presence in your life – that is 'PEACE' and 'PEACE' in you! Truly, God who is peace to creation, brought peace to creation. God is order, and order of God in one's life brings peace which is completeness of being.

Who bring peace in your life and why?

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Are you searching for peace in you and for your life? :

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Prayer: Dear Lord, we know you as our peace from before creation was at peace. Help us to find peace in us through the power of Your Word, forever and ever more. Amen!

Read Nehemiah 5: 5

“Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others.”

Please look again to yesterday's devotion and review how we have explained and defined 'PEACE' – surely in Nehemiah's conversation with the poor (the oppressed) who were forced to sell their children into slavery just to bring food into the table – it clearly indicates the absence of peace.

The absence of wholeness in a person's life, tends to cause cruelty towards others. This phrase is likely familiar to you “if I were to get so much amount of money, say a million, my problems will be sorted”. In the story of Nehemiah with the poor proves very clear that money alone does not bring peace, instead it can bring brokenness like what the rich people did in the story.

Does the above account of inhumanity, (ie: an account of the absence of the peace to the poor) make you ponder?

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How can you respond to a situation that disempowers the needy like in this text of today's devotion?

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Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help us to love others as you love us and forgive us who dehumanise others in what we do and say to others. Hear us we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

Read Nehemiah 5: 6 and 11

“When I heard their outcry and these, I was very angry. Give back to them immediately their fields, olive groves and houses and the interest you are charging them – one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil”. Peace sometimes is attainable by the involvement of the ambassadors of the truth. Nehemiah embodied truth with courage like an African proverb that says “Umntu ngumntu ngabantu” which means a person is a person through recognition and support by another person(s). In other words, peace in those who feel at peace - economically, socially, spiritually, geographically, and politically can be complete when they get uneasy by those who are not at peace, like Nehemiah whose uneasiness made him angry when he heard about the injustice and dehumanisation of the poor from the poor.

Media reports has made the absence of peace from the poor so normal that, when the mistreatment of the poor gets reported it sounds so normal that many people do not get easily angered by the injustice. However, I wish to make a plea to you now, that you may allow the Spirit of God to empower you to be angry at the injustices/absence of peace. For your anger to the absence of peace, creates a passion to do good for others.

Prayer: God of justice, thanks for the courage you placed in Nehemiah for the sake of bringing peace and wholeness to the poor and powerless community. May you inject us now with the same spirit boldness and courage to bring truth and justice to victims and perpetrators of bad behaviours. Amen.

Read John 14: 27

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”
Jesus Christ knew beforehand that His disciples would only survive the chaos and new future if they are spiritually free. In preparation of His disciples as He foretold His death, He assured the disciples wholeness of life even when He has departed.

You will probably, agree that from the past 18 months to date, a common terminology frequently used is ‘FEAR’ – but Jesus left ‘PEACE’ to the disciples before He was convicted for saving lives and crucified to death. Post resurrection, the disciples lived in fear of the Jews as they locked themselves away inside the upper room in fear of others. As Jesus Christ replaced fear with peace in the lives of the disciples – I challenge us/you to replace fear now in your life with peace.

What is troubling you and why ?

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Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the special peace you gave us long before we could think of your peace. Help us defeat our fears by your peace in our lives. Now and forever more ! Amen

Read Philippians 4: 7

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”

Peace is not like a commodity that you can buy from a shop. Peace of God, is the peace from God not in anyway in accordance with the standards of the world. This peace which comes from the fruits of the spirit, is not like the human made peace but the fruits of our faith in many ways.

Like Paul, in his conversation with the Philippian Christians about the power of God that can transform lives and situations beyond what the human flesh can imagine and measure. This peace is the very same peace that Jesus in John 20 breathed it unto His disciples at their time of fear and confusion. Peace brings calmness to humanity that is immensurable. The peace of God is beyond us and only God can enact it to happen in his ways.

Covid-19 has taken away wholeness for many of us in many ways, as many of us lost their loved ones while some of us – endures lifelong pains of loss of income, loss of jobs, health complications from the virus. However, God’s peace that surpasses all human understanding will restore all that has been lost. I therefore, remind us/you to hold fast in faith to God who is the gives and take away.

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Prayer: God of mystery, God of light, God of peace, God joy , You are Love and Unity ! We give thanks to you for your fruit of spirit in ‘PEACE’. May wrap us in your mysterious peace during our difficulty times. Amen

Read Psalm 4:8

“In peace I will lie down and sleep; for You alone, Lord , make me dwell in safety.”

The Psalmist is aware of the source of peace – that it is only God, and the psalmist calls upon God to relief him from all distress. God is peace and in God we find peace!

God is the only place of refuge for those who are searching for peace, whether it's peace from family matters or spiritual matters or work matters call upon the Lord for the peace that brings light and contentment.

During the contemporary times of many troubles, the peace of God is what the world need to be back on its feet. Many Churches are discerning about what is it that God requires from them at this season and many of our Churches are worrying about what will the Church look like in the future. Instead of seeking to abide in the peace of God, we all at times worry about the sustainability of the Church of Christ.

Today, the psalmist invites and challenges us to stay in the peace of God because that is where the prosperity and joy comes from. Therefore, let us all abide in peace of God because that place in God is worthy to be trusted. The Lord be with all of you, as you abide in Him.

How much do you trust in the Lord for your peace in this current season?
Why?

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Prayer: Dear Lord, make us peacemakers who stay on You and keep us away from troubles of this world. Lastly, Jesus Christ – give us as your people peace at all times and in every situation (in RSA, eSwatini, Mozambique, and many other parts of the world). Amen

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT
PATIENCE

week 4 : day 1

Read Colossians 1:3-14

Over the last few weeks we've been focusing on the Fruit of the Spirit and our mental health. Often, when we think of the Fruit of the Spirit we think of external behaviour. In other words, when I think of the fruit of Patience, I think that I need to learn to patient with people around me. Suddenly I focus on the way I treat those around me, but very seldom do I think of whether or not I am patient with myself. When we live a life where we are impatient with ourselves we end up being exhausted, over committed, stressed and generally simply disappointed with ourselves. This isn't the life of freedom that God desires for us, but rather it is a life of striving and hardship. A psychologist Dr. Carla Marie Manly wrote this about being impatient with ourselves: "When we are impatient with ourselves, we create stressful thoughts and life patterns. If this becomes a constant pattern, we can create a life that is filled with stress and anxiety. When this occurs, the body becomes flooded with elevated levels of cortisol and adrenaline – both of which can contribute to Physical health issues, sleep problems, and mental health concerns. On the one hand, when we are patient with ourselves, we tend to feel much more at peace internally and externally. A patient attitude tends to create greater self-worth, self-love, and inner stability"

As we start this week let us spend today examining ourselves.

- Am I patient with myself?
- Do I give myself a break when I'm tired?
- Do I allow myself to make mistakes, or do I beat myself up when I make a mistake?
- Do I expect more from myself and so constantly critique myself because I'm not doing enough?
- Do I live with extreme guilt and shame – how could I have done that?

Prayer: Gracious Father help us to live fruitful lives of patience, may we become patient people, even with ourselves. Amen.

Read Matthew 11:28

We live in a culture today where massive emphasis is placed on achievement and productivity. To the point that we base our worth on our achievements and productivity. The result of this is a life where we are not very patient with ourselves because we live a life of constant striving. We start thinking the key to happiness or contentment or self-love or self-worth is directly attached to our actions and achievements. So we live a life of constant striving. When we base our worth on anything external it will always fall short and so we live with constant striving and disappointment because we are never enough. This exhausts us and causes us to ironically be less effective which makes us more impatient with ourselves.

Years ago I would run stay awakes for the youth groups at my church. We planned activities for the entire night and it was so much fun. By the next morning though I would try and make sure that all the youth were out and home before 10am. If this didn't happen everyone became snappy with each other including me. I soon realised that when I'm tired, or when most people are tired, our patience levels decrease. The smallest irritation or set back can trigger a massive response.

The opposite of striving is rest. Jesus clearly valued rest in His own life and the lives of his disciples. He even promises to give us rest. If you are tired, exhausted, find that you have lived a life of constant striving and disappointment. Can we go to Jesus, find our worth in Him. We are worthy of love not because of what we do but because we are made in the Divine Image of God and loved by Christ. Our worth comes from who we are part of. We need to realise that we are not machines, but we have energy levels that ebb and flow and that's ok. May we learn the Spiritual practice of REST.

Prayer: Loving Father may we find our worth in You and so learn to rest in You, rather than live a life of striving. Amen.

Read Luke 9:10

As soon as I'm in a rush I have no patience. The same is true with my attitude towards my children. I am naturally patient with them, until I'm running late, then all patience runs out and I become a maniac mother. There seems to be a direct correlation with patience and rush. I notice the same even with myself. I often make silly mistakes in life. When recording sermons for example I've recorded a 40 minute talk without pressing record. I've recorded a message with my phone upside down and the latest was that my battery was flat and died without me knowing. This is a complete waste of time and under normal circumstances I can laugh at these mistakes and then start over. However, when I'm rushed I get angry with myself and call myself all sorts of names.

There is a danger in cramming our lives and the consequences of overstimulation is that we end up holding ourselves to impossible standards and then we get impatient with ourselves when we show 'slow' progress. Research shows that multitasking actually damages our productivity and can negatively impact the way our brain processes information.

Jesus and his disciples worked hard in Luke 9 and then at the end of it Jesus takes his disciples and they withdrew to Bethsaida. I love this verse because it shows that withdrawing is not only allowed, it is encouraged. Jesus lived a life of constant serving and retreating. He gave and then he withdrew and received. This rhythm of life meant that Jesus gave the best to everyone. He was present when with people, yet allowed Himself to rest and withdraw. If you find yourself impatient with yourself, perhaps you need time to withdraw, to rest, to switch off.

Prayer: Loving Father, thank you that you encourage us to switch off, slow down, rest and be rejuvenated. May we find a way to live this life of healthier rhythms. In Jesus name, Amen.

Read Matthew 1:1-2

When we are filled with shame our patience with ourselves will be depleted. When I expect more from myself and then let myself down I will tend to have negative thoughts about myself. This in turn leads to a voice in my head which constantly tells me how much of a disappointment I am. I was reading an article about recovery from addiction and one of the things this article said which struck me was that we don't reach rock bottom overnight, so why do we think recovery will happen over night? We often give in to temptation because of a long time of being worn out and worn down, we often fail because of unhealthy rhythms over long periods of time. Then, instead of being patient with ourselves we are filled with shame and self-loathing. Recovery, whether from addiction, burnout, sin, failure, will take time and we shouldn't be impatient with ourselves, but gentle, kind and loving. These things are fruit of the Spirit and they come from having a relationship with the Spirit. Jesus teaches us that He doesn't desire us to live lives of judgement and criticism, not even of ourselves, but lives of love, tolerance, patience and kindness.

I often wonder if God can forgive me so freely, why do I struggle to forgive myself? Perhaps the reason is because I live my life in judgment instead of grace.

If we want to live lives filled with patience, one of the things we need to learn is to forgive ourselves rather than live in constant judgement of ourselves. Love always leads to transformation, healing and patience. Judgement on the other hand leads to disappointment, anger, frustration, and impatience.

Prayer: Father, may we be patient with our failures and gracious in every part of our lives. In Jesus name, Amen

Read Acts 20:22-24

“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace”

This passage is about Paul saying farewell to the people Ephesus as he heads towards Jerusalem. Paul knows that there are hardships and difficulties facing him there. Yet, he is very clear that he only has one role, one goal, one mission that needs to be fulfilled. This mission is to testify to the gospel of God’s grace. I wonder if we testify to God’s grace? Testifying to God’s grace is more than simply telling people about the grace of God. Testifying to God’s grace is living lives of grace. It is treating everyone, including ourselves with grace. Sometimes it is easier to treat others with grace than ourselves. In other words it is easier to forgive someone else, it is easier to not be disappointed with someone else, but rather to understand their perspective. However, perhaps this is because we expect little from them and expect much from ourselves. Is this not a form of egotism?

To live truly grace filled lives is to live a life that is gracious towards ourselves as well. Many of us have a harsh, relentless inner voice that creates impatience and tells us we are not enough. We need to learn to recognize that voice. When we hear that voice, which is not the voice of grace, we need to tell that voice to go away. Perhaps we need to be asking ourselves; How would I treat someone else in my situation? How would I treat my child in this situation?

Prayer: Father may we live lives of absolute grace as we testify to Your grace. In Jesus name, Amen

Read 2 Timothy 1:7

The other day our dogs ran out the yard. They don't normally do this, but for some reason our little yorkie decided he wanted to visit the neighbour's dogs. My children ran after this dog and when they finally caught up to him he was through the fence and in the yard of someone with really big dogs. My children, who normally never get angry with this particular little dog, were furious. I explained to them that when we are afraid, we often lash out in anger. They were afraid that something would happen to their puppy and so their response was impatience with this puppy. I do the same with my children, my patience is thin when I'm afraid. It is almost impossible to have patience when we are filled with fear. We've been living in heightened fear situations throughout the world, but particularly South Africa for a long time. Our fear levels are higher than is healthy and so it would be understandable that we are less patient with ourselves and others.

However, fear doesn't come from God. So how do we counter this fear? Perhaps the way we counter fear and become more patient is through gratitude. My children were afraid of losing their dog because they love their dog. Therefore to counter the fear is to be thankful. If I find I'm afraid of something happening to my children I need to realise it's because I love my children and so need to respond with gratitude and thankfulness rather than fear.

I wonder how your fear levels are at the moment? If our fear levels are too high it will be very difficult to be patient with ourselves. Perhaps for the next few days we could embark on an exercise that every time you are filled with fear say a prayer of thanksgiving for what you fear. In other words, when I'm afraid of losing my job "Lord thank you for my job that means so much", or if I'm afraid of being isolated from my family instead of focusing on the potential of that happening, "Thank you Lord for my family". Gratitude counters fear and leads to patience.

**Prayer: Jesus, Thank you for your comfort, may we find your peace.
In Jesus name, Amen.**

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT
KINDNESS THROUGH MERCY

week 5 : day 1

One of the greatest ways we can show kindness to ourselves is not as self-indulgence, but as mercy. Through Gods loving kindness he showed us incredible mercy and has forgiven us from all our sins and shortfalls. Through His kindness we have been washed clean and have new life in Christ! We are set free from the past and all the pain and restrictions of our chains! *“But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” Titus 3:4-6.*

In Corinthians Paul reminds us that all things are ours in Christ, he goes on to list that the present and the future are ours but makes no mention of the past! The past does not belong to us. Our past was bought with a price, the precious blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ! We have been forgiven, and yet, so many of us still carry the guilt and shame from our past with us because we have never truly forgiven ourselves! We have allowed bitterness and resentment to grow in our hearts towards ourselves and are living life limited by the weight of the baggage we are carrying around! For us to truly take hold of the wonderful life we have in Christ we must make an intentional decision to show ourselves the same kindness God showed us by forgiving ourselves. God's forgiveness is not earned through works, it is a free gift that we simply have to receive. May we choose to extend that same no strings attached gift to ourselves and finally walk free from the weight of our past. May we choose to let go of the past and forgive ourselves. “Getting over a painful experience is much like crossing monkey bars, you have to let go at a point in order to move forward” -C.S Lewis.

***Prayer:* Lord Jesus, help me let go.**

One of the ways that we can show kindness to ourselves is by thinking kind thoughts towards ourselves. Thoughts are powerful. Scripture reminds us that as a man thinks, so he becomes! When we allow our inner critic to narrate our lives, we will find ourselves in a negative place. In proverbs we are reminded that, “*Kind words are like honey—sweet to the soul and healthy for the body*” -Prov. 15:4 and that, “*Gentle words bring life and health; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.*” -Prov. 16:24. The thoughts we have towards ourselves are important! The word ‘Kindness’, as it appears in Galatians 5, is translated from the Greek word ‘*Chrestos*’ which means, softening or mellowing of something that was once harsh. Would you describe the way you speak to yourself as soft or harsh? I often find myself speaking harshly towards myself! I regularly catch myself saying things that I would never dare say to anyone else, like, “why are you so stupid” How could you forget to do that”, “that was a dumb idea”.

When Jesus walked this earth, there is one phrase he repeated more than any other; Repent for the kingdom of heaven is in reach. Repent, in this context, literally meant to change the way you think! Jesus is saying that our ability to experience the present realities of the kingdom of heaven is directly related to the thoughts we are thinking! We must learn to silence our inner critic by cultivating an inner advocate. When our inner critic comes with ridicule, our inner advocate must jump in and present arguments on our behalf. Speaking kindly to ourselves starts with becoming aware of the thoughts we are thinking. Once we are aware, we must do what the apostle Paul commanded us to do, we must take captive every thought and make it obedient with the truth of Christ!

***Prayer:* Lord Jesus, remind me what you think about me so that I may extend the same kindness to myself.**

If we are to be kind to ourselves, we must give ourselves permission to set healthy boundaries in our relationships. Boundaries can often be viewed negatively as a way to keep the other out, but a more helpful way to view them is as psychology today describes, “*the whole point of having boundaries is so that we can contain ourselves within the parameters of where I stop, and others begin*”. Boundaries are less about others and more about us. Its about knowing our limits, knowing what conversations to engage in, what messages need our attention and what debates are worth taking part in. Not everything is urgent and not everything is necessary. Setting healthy boundaries is ultimately about placing what God has called you to do and who He has called you to be at the centre of your life so that you have perspective on what is important and are liberated from the guilt that comes from saying no to all the peripheral things, to living up to other people's expectations of who you should be and what you should do. A life without boundaries just leads to burnout! When Jesus walked the earth, He had far more stress, pressure, and responsibility than any of us and yet he remained relaxed, joyful, and generous with people because he set up healthy boundaries. He withdrew from crowds who wanted more from Him to be alone with God, He accepted His personal limits and he said no to inappropriate behaviour. He was the only perfect person to ever walk the face of this earth and He did so while setting boundaries. This gives as a new picture of what perfection looks like in relationships! We do not have to be everything for everyone every second of everyday. It is ok to say no. It is ok to take a moment for ourselves. It is ok to have a limit and express a need. If we never say no to anything, we can never truly say yes to anything.

***Prayer:* Lord Jesus, give me the courage I need to say no.**

GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO REST

One of the stories in scripture that comes to mind each time I think about God's kindness is the story of Elijah. When he was tired beyond measure and could not go on anymore, he sat beneath the broom bush and prayed that God would take him from this world. God's response was so kind. God did not give him a motivational speech to keep going in his undone state, God did not rebuke him for giving up and God didn't place any further demands on him, instead, God gave him some food to eat and time to lie down and have a rest! When last did you show yourself this kind of kindness and give yourself time to breath in in a world that demands all your breath? Rest is so important to our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health! We are living in a culture that places prestige on business, but we were not created to live this way! We were not created to be split so thin and to always feel exhausted. Living this way wont lead to anything good in the long run! In fact, we become less productive the more frantic we are! Charles Spurgeon makes a profound statement, "*Rest time is not waste time. It is economy to gather fresh strength... It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less.*" When we pause, we are empowered to accomplish more than when we strive without rest! Rest increases our inner capacity. Rest is a gift that we must give ourselves.

When the disciples were feeling overwhelmed by the increasing and demanding crowd Jesus offered them an invitation, "he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest". Mark 6:31 One of the best ways we can show ourselves kindness is by giving ourselves permission to rest in a culture where exhaustion is seen as a status symbol!

***Prayer:* Lord Jesus, when life becomes overwhelming, remind me to take time to breath in and rest.**

GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO ENJOY LIFE

We are often guilty of placing a high emphasis on some of the spiritual disciplines, while forgetting the others. We place a very high emphasis on service, worship, fasting and prayer. While these are extremely important and should not get any less of our attention, there is another discipline that is just as important and deserves equal attention, the discipline of Celebration! The old and new testament are full of stories of great celebration. I think of how David danced before the Lord and how Jesus attended that wedding with his friends. I think of the passage in Zephaniah where the prophet declares that God takes delight in us and that he rejoices over us in singing! Have you ever thought about how profound that is? God delights over us! God enjoys us! And he wants us to live the same way, He wants us to enjoy life! His word is full of commands to do so! We are constantly instructed in the psalms to celebrate, to dance, to sing and to be joyful! In Psalm 34:8 the psalmist tells us to taste and see that God is good! This instruction reminds us that our ability to see and to taste the good things in life actually increases our capacity as worshipers! Celebration is transformational! In the gospel of John, Jesus reminds us that His plan is that we live a full, rich, and satisfying life! "*The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.*" - John 10:10 God doesn't just want us to be alive, He wants us to enjoy being alive. To show ourselves kindness, we must give ourselves permission to enjoy life! We must give ourselves permission to enjoy time with friends, to enjoy food, and to enjoy time in the sunshine. We must give ourselves permission to laugh, to sing, to dance and to play. We must find time in our day to do things that give us joy!

***Prayer:* In A world filled with work, remind me of the importance of play. Remind me to enjoy life.**

One of the most profound ways we can be kind to ourselves is to begin to treat ourselves as a friend! So often we treat ourselves as an enemy! When we fail to reach a goal we are discouraging, when we make a mistake, we act in anger towards ourselves and are critical and demeaning. Treating ourselves as an enemy is damaging! It affects the way we exist in the world and what we will achieve with our lives! Jesus makes a profound statement to the scribes in the gospel of Mark, He says, "*If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand*" - Mark 3:24. The good news translations puts it like this, "*If a country divides itself into groups which fight each other, that country will fall apart*" When we act as an enemy towards ourselves, we will eventually fall apart and we will never be the conquerors God intended us to be! Imagine how transformational it would be if instead, we treated ourselves as we would treat a friend? A helpful exercise is to ask yourself how you would respond when one of your friends fails at something? What would you say to them? How would you reassure them? How would you care for them? Now, imagine offering yourself the same kindness! Imagine if every time we achieved something, we took a moment to recognise the success, the way we would to a friend. Imagine if each time we felt unmotivated we took a moment to reassure ourselves by reminding ourselves of our past achievement and strength, as we would a friend. Imagine if each time we felt sad, we took ourselves for a cup of coffee like we would do to cheer up a friend. Showing yourself this kind of kindness is not selfish, it is biblical! Treating ourselves the way we treat others is part of the greatest commandment! Jesus reminds us to 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

***Prayer:* Father God, teach me how to make friends with me.**

Fruits of the Spirit

Kindness

Welcome: Share a moment where you have been moved by someone's kindness towards you.

Worship: Be kind to yourself-Andrew Peterson

<https://youtu.be/sYiM-sOC6nE>

Word: Titus 3:4-6, Proverbs 16:2, Psalm 34:8

Questions:

- Why do you think showing yourself mercy is important?
- Why does speaking harshly to yourself seem to come more naturally than to others?
- Why do you think Christ set boundaries in His life?
- What stops you from setting boundaries in your own life?

Work: Find one way to show yourself kindness this week

Read Galatians 5:22-23 & Philippians 4:4-7

Gentleness is something someone would associate or link it to weakness but is all about humility, and it definitely goes in hand with the other fruits of the spirit.

When Paul writes in his letter for the church in Colossae. Colossians Chapter 3, verse 12. It speaks about how they need to clothe themselves with things such as compassion, kindness, humility and patience those are the things that walk alongside gentleness.

Gentleness is the quality of being kind to each other, along with having compassion for each other. Just like the church of Colossae was encouraged to live a life full of compassion, showing humility to each other, being patient with each other and doing it in a way that was gentle we are also called to do the same. We are called to be kind, to show ubuntu (humility), being patient with each other and living in peace and life full of compassion.

Gentleness is like a lifestyle, we need to live it out, willingly living it out focus on things that will let this fruit standing out to be a fruit of the Spirit that others will see and be impacted by it.

Prayer: Dear Lord, teach me to be kind, compassionate like you Lord Jesus

Read Galatians 5:22-23 & Philippians 4:4-7

Gentle words can change situations. My siblings and I used to fight a little, but maybe argued a lot. I remember once purposefully deciding that instead of winding up my brother with my words, I would respond differently towards the situation. I recall that when I answered him he was so shocked, because he was expecting a different answer, he was ready to answer back with something but because I was not nice with my words he actually gave up and gave me what I wanted at the time. The words I used, which I believe were very gentle and calm, changed the situation, the atmosphere changed, the emotions changed.

We sometimes use words that will aggravate someone and bring them to a place that will leave them uncomfortable and angry or experiencing emotions that are unpleasant.

I remember what Jesus did for the woman caught in adultery, He remained calm and through the gentle words and acts of kindness, He challenged the teachers of the law and they reacted differently because of the kindness that Jesus showed to the woman. She then experienced freedom, she experienced Grace. (John 8:1-11)

Gentleness through words bring peace and freedom to other people and for us as humans.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me guard my words, may I speak gentle words to bring peace.

Read Galatians 5:22-23 & Philippians 4:4-7

Yesterday we touched on the story of when a woman caught in adultery encountered grace through the gentle words and kindness acts of Jesus Christ.

today I am reflecting on how Jesus Christ was actually gentle in His walk of life, gentle in the way He encountered people, how He used gentleness to minister to other people.

Things bring me a few questions of how is gentleness evident in our lives, my life and your life?

- How are we gentle when we meet people who are in need?
- How are we gentle when we see people begging in the street?
- How gentle are we when we are asked to help?

Just like it was said in the first devotion this week, gentleness goes with kindness as well as the other fruit of the Spirit . When we go about in with our daily lives and encounter people we need to ask ourselves questions when encountering people such as:

- Have I showed gentleness while talking to that person ?
- Have I offered help in a gentle way ?
- Was I living out the fruit of gentleness today?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to live and show gentleness to others

Read Galatians 5:22-23 & Philippians 4:4-7

I asked a friend the other day, what he thinks of gentleness and his immediately answer was the assumption that that gentleness was a weakness. This reminded me of being part of a rugby team, when we were trained and encouraged to be tough and strong, and not be gentle and weak.

Most of the time gentleness is associated with weakness but however it is never the case, gentleness is in fact the strong hand. Consider the analogy of a mother raising a child, she has to be gentle with the way she holds the child, the way she dresses the child even in feeding the child. Through her gentleness she was being strong for her child.

Gentleness does not mean that one is weak, when we are gentle we are taking care of other people, we nurse our relationships with other people as Christ followers.

Isaiah 42 is a prophesy about Jesus Christ, and verse 1 speaks about how Jesus is so gentle that He will bring justice to all nations, and it is through His gentleness, not weakness we experienced grace, and He saved the whole world, all nations received justice.

Prayer: Dear Lord thank you for your grace, and through your grace I can experience gentleness.

Read Galatians 5:22-23 & Philippians 4:4-7

Yesterday we looked at how we sometimes associate gentleness with weakness, we were reminded that gentleness does not mean weakness, it is translated meekness. This is a fruit of the Spirit that helps us to be more like Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew records a beautiful picture of Jesus Christ living out gentleness, “See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey” Matthew 21:5.

The gift of being humble and gentleness is what Jesus Christ served us with when He died on the cross, today He is risen in glory and we are offered the gift of His gentleness through the Holy Spirit. When we allow the Holy spirit to lead us we will be filled with the fruit of gentleness. Gentleness places our strength under God’s guidance and it is a powerful tool for the Kingdom of God.

“Blessed are the gentle for they will inherit the earth.” – Matthew 5:5

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit that blesses us with fruits for our lives.

This past week we have focused on Gentleness, under the theme Fruits of the Spirit. Today we will be praying. Praying for the fruits of the Spirit to be evident in our lives, to not hinder us from a relationship with God, and the relationship with other people.

Throughout the day pray and spend some time pondering, and hopefully spend some time in solitude thinking about each Fruits of the Spirit that we have covered in the past weeks and the one we will look at next week.

Below is a guideline that you can use for your prayer time and solitude moment.

Guidelines

- Pray for the Love Fruit. Teach me Lord to love my neighbour as I love myself and teach me to love your creation
- Pray for the Joy Fruit. Fill me up with your Joy dear Lord, so that I can be able to share it with other people.
- Pray for the Peace Fruit. Holy Spirit, fill my soul with your Peace, teach me and help me to walk in peace.
- Pray for the Patience Fruit. Dear Jesus, teach me to be patience with your will and with the people I encounter
- Pray for the Faithfulness Fruit. Lord Jesus teach me to be faithful in my walk with you and with the people I live with.
- Pray for the Gentleness Fruit. Holy Spirit grant me with gentleness, teach me and help me to be gentle with the people around me and to be humble every day.
- Pray for the Self-Control Fruit. Dear God, teach me to have self-control, guard me to resist when I should.

Prayer: Lord in your mercy Hear our prayers.

Fruits of the Spirit – Gentleness

Reflection on DAVID AND GOLIATH

Welcome: This week spend some time seeking ways to apply one of the fruits of the Spirit, which is gentleness this week.

Worship: Spend sometime listening to Gentle like Jesus, by Sovereign Grace music

Word: Read Galatians 5 & Philippians 4

God is always working in our lives, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can be gentle like Jesus, we can strive to be humble like Jesus Christ.

- How are you gentle like Jesus today?

Work: This week spend sometime looking for moments to live out and practice the fruits of the spirit gentleness along with the other fruits we have learned about the previous weeks.

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT
SELF-CONTROL

week 7 : day 1

Reading: 1 Peter 1:5-7

“In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because “God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.”

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” As we share this week on our last of the Fruit of the Spirit, self-control I am wondering how you have been able to do some introspection at your own living. Thanks to modern medicine, our physical health is relatively easy to monitor. We go to the doctor go through an exam, check our vitals, do some blood tests, and compare our results to a set standard that tells us where our numbers should fall for a person of our age. And with those results, the doctor determines our overall health and he sets some reasonable goals for us to work toward to get us in optimal health.

But what about our Spiritual Health? Have you checked in the same way you would physically? So what are we looking for? What’s the set standard we should use to tell us where we should be? Our tendency is to compare ourselves to other people. And most often we tend to compare ourselves with those folk that make us look and feel like literal saints.

Friends, can I suggest that as you share in this devotion you will pause for a moment and reflect on the Fruit of the Spirit love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control that is in your life and uses these fruit as a set standard. Are they visible to others?

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit that blesses us with fruits for our lives.

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT
SELF-CONTROL

week 7 : day 2

Reading: Galatians 5:22-23

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things"

Self-control is probably not the most popular of the fruits of the Spirit. Certainly not one that we will sing songs about on a Sunday morning in the Sanctuary. In the current situation we find ourselves in here in 2021, we could take some debate that the world needs love more than self-control, but when I think of self-control something struck me. Firstly, we have to take notice that self-control isn't issued as a command for us to behave. Paul tells us that there is a wonderful list of fruits which flourish from faith. Fruit is something that grows naturally if the tree is fed and watered. These fruits grow because we are being fed and watered with God. Self-control in the time of COVID-19 is, amongst other things, washing your hands and not touching your face. It's staying away from others when necessary, and not putting the most vulnerable at risk of infection. It's tiny daily acts of thoughtful sacrifice. We literally have to think of others as we use our hands. How is it that we can do this, when no one is looking, when no one will thank us?"

Living by the Spirit empowers us to live for others, to hold instincts in check, because we care about what impact we have on those around us. These are the real day to day choices that loving our neighbour calls for at the moment. Self-Control is deliberately choosing to do the harder thing, the less selfish thing, because we are wanting to sacrifice for another, our neighbour. We know we can do this, even when everything in us is about self-preservation, because the Spirit of the one who sacrificed everything lives in us.

Prayer : God our Father, today we chose to live life that puts others first. Amen

Reading: Proverbs: 25:28

“A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.”

This quote had a profound impact on my understanding of self-control:
“Self-control is the ability to pursue the important over the impulsive and is an indispensable ingredient of Christian discipleship.”

What an important lesson as we face many things beyond our control in our community and country at the moment!

So often we are led by the impulsiveness of our own needs and wants. Defaulting to Survival mode and throwing caution to the wind.

This fruit of self-control offered to us by the Spirit of God, enables us to clear the wood from the trees and pursue the important. This word pursue reminds me of our relationship with God as the shepherd. The one who looks out for us, searches for us, cares for our scrapes and wounds when we stray off the path.

Friends, it takes self-control to remain focused on our pursuit of God and to remain faithful and hopeful in time of adversity.

Can I invite you today to spend some time in silence with God and reflect on these two questions:

- What is one area of your life that is succeeding in the exercise of self-control?
- What is one area that is lacking self-control, in which you desire to grow?

PRAYER : O God of love, thank you that you guide us to notice the blessing and important relationships in our lives. Remind us today that impulsiveness can lead to heartache but self control brings us closer to you. Amen

Reading: Proverbs 16:32

“It is better to be patient than powerful. It is better to win control over yourself than over whole cities.”

How many of us mistake self-control with patience? They are starkly different from one another. Self-control allows us to keep our mind focused on God while avoiding the temptation of our desires. What are the temptations you are facing right now? What are the bad habits you have developed during this unsettling time in our world? These temptations can be strong, but our spiritual self-control can be stronger with the help of our faith.

A universal truth is that our biggest spiritual enemy is often ourselves, it takes the fruit of the Spirit within us to help us stay connected with our God. Friends, the more we embrace spiritual practices during our times of adversity the easier self-control will be. Prayer, scripture reflection, silence and meditation and partaking in the Eucharist.

Participating in the means of Grace will point us to God! When you find you are struggling to cope, needing to rest and catch your breath, remember that choosing self-control is stepping into the gift of living a Christ like life.

PRAYER : Father God, help me to keep my eyes fixed on you so that I don't fall into temptation. Amen

Reading: Galatians 5: 22-24 NIV

Six Steps to Exercising Self-Control

The gospel is the motivation we need to overcome anything that has threatened to overcome us. Christ is glorified when we exercise self-control! Friends here are some suggestions and practical ideas for exercising self-control.

- Step 1. Renew your mind through God's Word. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).
- Step 2. Pray for the Holy Spirit's help. "I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him...and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe" (Ephesians 1:16,17-19).
- Step 3. Confess your habits to God and others. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).
- Step 4. Identify and remove your triggers. "...put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24).
- Step 5. Remember the gospel when you struggle. "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

PRAYER : Holy Spirit pf God. Thank you for your word that offers me so much hope and encouragement today. Amen

Reading: Galatians 5: 22-24 MSG

“But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.

Legalism is helpless in bringing this about; it only gets in the way. Among those who belong to Christ, everything connected with getting our own way and mindlessly responding to what everyone else calls necessities is killed off for good—crucified.”

How does the Spirit of God manifest itself through us? Often we think that to witness means to speak up in defence of God. This idea can make us very self-conscious. We wonder where and how we can make God the topic of our conversations and how to convince our families, friends, neighbours, and colleagues of God's presence in their lives. But this explicit missionary endeavour often comes from an insecure heart and, therefore, easily creates divisions.

The way God's Spirit manifests itself most convincingly is through its fruits: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22).

These fruits speak for themselves. It is therefore always better to raise the question “How can I grow in the Spirit?” than the question “How can I make *others* believe in the Spirit?” *Henri Nouwen

PRAYER : Jesus Christ, will you be with me as I seek to answer the question : How can I make others believe in the Spirit. Amen

Fruit of the Spirit – Self Control

Group Notes

Welcome:

Share a moment from this week where you lacked self-control

Worship: I Surrender - Hillsong Worship - YouTube

Prayer:

God grant me the serenity

To accept the things I cannot change; Courage to change the things I can;
And wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time; Enjoying one moment at a time;

Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; Taking, as He did, this sinful
world As it is, not as I would have it;

Trusting that He will make all things right If I surrender to His Will;

So that I may be reasonably happy in this life

And supremely happy with Him Forever and ever in the next.

Amen

Word:

Fruit of the Spirit Galatians 5:22-23

Self-Control Prov. 16:32; 25:28; Rom 13:12-14; I Cor. 6:12; 9:25-27; 1Thess.
5: 22; Titus 2:12; Heb. 12:2; II Pet. 1:5-7

Questions:

How would you define self-control?

What happens to our relationships with God and others when we relinquish
self-control?

What can you do today to begin cultivating Joy in your life?

Work: Think through the steps you need to take to put Self-Control into
action in a specific instance. How can you place safe guards against the
areas in your life where you are weakest? Or how can you avoid situations,
things, certain people and places that may cause you to lose control? Or
how can you balance your relationship with self, others and God, still
maintaining self-control?