

DAY 8 | TO PRODUCE THE FRUIT OF JAN 18 | THE SPIRIT

Galatians 5:22: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

1 Corinthians 13:4: Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

Several years ago, after helping our young son memorize the above verse, he proudly recited, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy; it does not burst." We chuckled, because while we knew he meant to say boast, there was certainly some truth in saying love does not burst as well!

The apostle Paul gives some great advice for loving and living in the Spirit in Galatians chapter 5. He tells us we are called to serve one another humbly; to love others like we love ourselves. He goes on to list the fruit that comes from living in step with God, one of which is love.

Love is a loaded word. If you asked ten people to describe it, you'd most likely get ten different answers. The good news is we don't have to guess what true, Godly love is. It's spelled out for us in the Word. Love is patient and kind. It doesn't 'burst' as my son recited, because it's controlled and gentle. It isn't rude, self-seeking, or easily angered. It doesn't delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

To hide his identity, let's call him 'Andrew.' He was 17 years old, grew up in a strong Christian home, and was clearly loved and cared for. He was close to graduating from high school, but the past few months had taken a turn for the worse.

Andrew was a smart kid, but academics were not his forte. His friends joked, "Andrew will work at McDonald's for his entire life." They thought it was funny. Andrew laughed about it on the outside but grew more broken inside. He began to think that if that's the way people thought of him, then he would live into it.

Early in the school year, he began to use drugs and drink alcohol with his friends. He kept it a secret from his family; he thought they would not understand.

In the dark, his addictions grew, moving to harder drugs. His family tried every method to get through to him. They tried punishment, and Andrew would rebel more. They tried loving him in every way they could think of, and he rebelled more. His family was exhausted and confused.

They came to a place where they finally realized that the situation was out of their hands - placing it entirely in God's hands.

His family cannot explain it, nor can he really, but when things seemed most hopeless, God saved him. Andrew struggles to put it into words, but somehow, somehow, he felt the love of God, and that altered the course of his life. It was almost as if a light went on inside him; the blinders were off. He was saved and delivered into the love of God. His family counts all of their failed attempts and gives God the glory for doing in Andrew what human beings could not.

REFLECTION

- Which fruits do you think you and those in your family bear easily and often?
- Which fruits do you think you should ask God to help you bear more of?

PRAYER

Gracious God, thank You for Your Word that describes so clearly what love is and for Your Son Jesus who humbly modeled it on earth for us. Help my family and I to produce the fruit of Your Spirit and love each other in a way that pleases You. May we always have a love that protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres.

DAY 9 | TO BE SAVED AND DELIVERED

JAN 19 |

Psalm 18:2: The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield.

REFLECTION

- Who does your heart ache for God to deliver and save?
- Will you trust that God will do the impossible in their lives?
- In this painful and confusing time, will you trust God to be your rock? Take refuge in Him.

PRAYER

Father, I pray for the hurting and lost of this world. I ask that You do what only You can in the life of (insert name). Be their Rock, their Redeemer. Use me in effective ways to show Your love. Enter into the hearts of those far from You. Be their Savior; deliver them into a transforming relationship with You. I pray for any loved ones by name who do not know the Lord or have fallen away from You. I ask You to reveal Yourself to them as the awesome God that You are.

Protect my family from all deception, temptation, and any plans of the enemy that would thwart the good plans God has for them.

You Will Not Abandon My Soul Psalm 16 A Miktam of David.

1 Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

2 I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."

3 As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.

4 The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips.

5 The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.

6 The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

7 I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.

8 I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure.

10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.

11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

DAY 10 | TO SERVE GOD TOGETHER

JAN 20

Psalms 92:1: It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High.

Psalms 100:2: Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

Joshua 24:15: As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

The Christian life was never intended to be solitary. Jesus shared His life with twelve disciples and then taught them to share it with others. The early believers gathered together to break bread and share the living Word. What we do each week in church is an expression of shared belief in Jesus—His body, a community of faith that gains strength and courage through worship.

However, a full and meaningful life of following Jesus is built on much more than one hour a week in church. It requires personal devotion and an interdependency with others in prayer, study, fellowship, and praise. In other words, the best way to follow and serve Jesus is in community.

Modern families come in all shapes and sizes. Whether you're widowed, single, divorced, or living in a blended family, God has a group for you, a place of intimate belonging. This cluster of believers is a smaller version of the church, or we could say the church is a larger expression of the family unit. However we view it, the purpose is to be a place for love, acceptance, prayer, and to celebrate the communion of Jesus among us.

Finding time to pray as a family beyond grace at meals is an important discipline. To share our hearts, burdens, and triumphs is important, as is encouraging each other to stay strong in the Lord (Ephesians 6:18). Prayer is as uncomplicated as talking to God together. Seeking time with a trusted brother or sister can move us from defeat to victory. Building the habit of worshiping together is critical to becoming the people God desires for us to become.

REFLECTION

- Who is your family, your community of faith, other than the church you attend?
- How do you express love, acceptance, grace, and encouragement with them?
- What elements of prayer and worship are regularly missing from your time with them?

PRAYER

Great Father God, Jesus my brother, Holy Spirit my Comforter... lead me into deeper communion and fellowship with You and with my community of faith. Begin with my own family to teach me to be bold to lead in worship and prayer, to bring the greatest glory to You, the only wise God, forever and ever.

DAY 11 | TO BE HEALED JAN 21 | AND RECONCILED

Psalms 107:20: He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.

Psalms 147:3: He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Malachi 4:6: He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.

The Scripture says in Matthew 4:1, "Jesus was led up by the (Holy) Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

It was God the Holy Spirit who placed Jesus in that desert for that particular time. There are no mistakes in God's plan. There is no plan B. We only know His complete plan for our lives as we look backward. A.W. Tozer said, "To the child of God, there is no such thing as an accident. Accidents may indeed appear to befall him and misfortune stalk his way; but these evils will be so in appearance only and will seem evil only because we cannot read the secret script of God's hidden providence."

Our whole perspective of life changes when we find ourselves facing overwhelming temptation, tragedy, or any hard situation that needs real healing or reconciliation. This happened to a pastor in Texas. His son and daughter-in-law, upon graduating from Bible school in Arlington, Texas, with a great ministry to the Mexican people before them, encountered some problems that provoked the son to think God did not really care for him. So he decided to quit the ministry. He was determined to separate himself from God. He stopped praying and reading Scripture and instead began drinking and staying out at night, etc. But on his way to inform the missions director of his decision, the son came around a curve, just outside of New Orleans, Louisiana and a tractor trailer, trying to avoid hitting a deer as it crossed the highway, plowed into his car, causing him to go to the hospital. Now he really believed God did not love him. But during the next six months, God brought him back to good health, but most importantly reconciled him back to Himself.

I have been there; we all have been there in one sense or another. The Lord occasionally does the same with all of us, testing our faith, leading us into hardship, teaching us wisdom, showing us His ways, changing our course on this journey called life, calling us back to Himself and in the process, healing us spiritually and sometimes physically. Our first reaction is usually anger, panic, and a sense of 'why is this happening to me if you love me so much, Lord?' But remember that deeper secret of the Christian life: "When we are in a difficult place, the Lord has placed us there, for reasons known for now only to Himself."

Sometimes, circumstances beyond our control can push us off the thin wire we walk upon. It could be the ringing of a phone, a knock on the door, a text, or an email. We fall immediately into worry and fear that separates us from God, from our friends, our spouses, etc. How can we not worry or fear when our outflow exceeds our income, when a loved one is diagnosed with cancer, when layoffs

occur at the company and our name is on the list, when our child is hurt or even killed, or our spouse wants to walk out? What is our hope? Where do we look for guidance in times like these?

We must pray to the One who has control over everything. We must ask Him to do what only He can do. And, we must consult the Scriptures for guidance and hope. Remember these men and women: Hagar, a single mom, was forced into a desert with her boy where they nearly died of thirst. Joseph, desiring to be used of God, was seized, stripped, sold, and imprisoned in Egypt. David, anointed by Samuel, was pursued by Saul's army. Most of the Lord's disciples, who followed the Lord's command to evangelize the world, died horrible deaths. The Lord Himself, fulfilling the Father's will, was nailed to a cross until dead.

Peter wrote in I Peter 4:12, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you. ..." In other words, we should not be surprised when we find ourselves trapped in painful, frightening, difficult, or impossible situations. As a matter of fact, these things are to be expected in this venture of following Christ. If we are in a time of trial, He is here. Remember, we are here. 1) By God's ordering, 2) In His grip, 3) Under His training, 4) For His time. But over and above that, our precious eternal Lord is here--He is the One who has promised never to leave or forsake us, never to forget or abandon us. So if we find ourselves in a difficult spot of needing healing and reconciliation, against all evidence to the contrary, there's no better place to be.

Real Healing and Reconciliation occur when we recognize we are exactly where God wants us to be.

REFLECTION

- Are you in a difficult place right now? •
- How can you allow God to bring healing and reconciliation in His way and in His timing?
- Ask Him to give you spiritual eyes to see where He is working.

PRAYER

Father God, You know everything about me. You know the challenges and hope that I have. I pray that You would guide my prayers, thoughts, and actions. I pray that You would give me spiritual eyes to see You in my life and give me the desire and ability to respond in a way that pleases You. Teach me what You want me to learn and help me to grow closer to You each day.

DAY 12 | TO RECEIVE A FRESH JAN 22 | OUTPOURING OF GOD'S SPIRIT

Psalms 51:2: Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

Psalms 51:7: Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Mark 2:22b: But new wine must be put into new wine skins.

There are many word pictures or descriptions of the Holy Spirit; one is water. Notice the request from Psalm 51 is for 'another' to wash, cleanse, and purify us. The very work of the Spirit invokes the idea of cleansing or purifying by literally being the 'Living Water' flowing in power from within. Also, Ephesians speaks of Christ and His bride "that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word." The living water and living word are ever present to do their work; we simply must say "yes" to His will and way in us and through us!

The new wine skins spoken of in Mark can refer to fresh governing or new governing of our lives. When the new spiritual 'mind-set' being the awareness of Christ's promise is fixed, fresh outpouring, 'New Wine' will follow. When new wine comes, 'times of refreshing' in the Spirit of the Lord will overcome and overtake us with breakthrough in all aspects of our lives and those we influence... as they did on the Day of Pentecost and throughout the book of Acts. Jesus started the church the way He wanted it; now He wants the church the way He started it! He wants us saturated with fresh outpouring!

REFLECTION

- Do you need a fresh awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence in your life?
- Will you ask Him to fill you to overflowing?

PRAYER

Lord, I pray for times of refreshing as Your Word and Holy Spirit's presence cleanse and renew me. I pray that I will be spiritually minded and that I will say yes to Your way and will through me. Thank you for Your faithfulness to me! I pray that my spiritual family will receive a fresh outpouring of Your Spirit!

DAY 13 | TO BE SERVED BY VISIONARY JAN 23 | LEADERS

Psalms 78:24: He rained down manna for the people to eat; he gave them the grain of heaven.

Habakkuk 2:1: I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart and watch to see what He will say to me.

Proverbs 29:18: Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom's instruction.

The crowd was buzzing. The morning dew was burning off under the heating sun. Dogs were barking, birds were chirping, and the announcers were instructing the trainers to bring their racing greyhound dogs to the track in the appropriate gates. These dogs have been bred and trained since birth to do one thing: run after the lure (an artificial, mechanical bunny). They were made for this.

The gate opens! The dogs sprint! The crowd erupts! The announcers shout! But this race had an unexpected turn...

Part way through the race, the lure exploded! For a brief moment, the dogs continued to run, but eventually slowed down, not knowing what to do.

Some ran around aimlessly, some ran back toward the gate where they began, and other dogs just lay down on the track pathetically with their tongues hanging out. There was no way to determine a winner, so the race was called off. The race was over.

So, what caused the dogs to lose focus? Why couldn't they continue the race? They lost their vision. Even though they had received the strictest training, they failed to achieve anything because they had nothing to aim for.

This story illustrates, in a simple way, the profound truth found in Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." This proverb takes on many different applications in many different settings. But let's not mistake a 'good plan' as the complete thought here. A vision cannot be a 'God given' vision unless it is guided by... well... God. As Christians, we find our ultimate vision in the pages of God's story, the Bible.

Vision is built. Not just by human effort and planning, but by seeking God through His Word and prayer.

REFLECTION

- What dream is God revealing to you?
- Are you ready to train and chase after God's vision for your life?
- Will you trust and pray for your church leaders?

PRAYER

Father, the giver of vision, help me to hear Your voice through Your Word. Mold and motivate me to chase Your vision for my life and the vision You have for Your church. Answer the prayers of the leaders of this church; give them a clear and passionate vision. Help the vision to stick on the hearts and minds of this congregation - that we might win the race with You! Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.

PRAYER FOR OUR COMMUNITY

DAY 14 | TO BE A HABITATION FOR JAN 24 | GOD'S PRESENCE

Psalms 100:3: Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture.

Psalms 95:7-8: For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care. Today, if only you would hear His voice, "Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness."

1 Timothy 2:8: Therefore, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.

Matthew 13:58: And He did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Several times in Scripture we see God looking for a person who will stand in the gap for a people, a nation, or the land. He desires to come with blessing, healing, and salvation and is looking for someone, or a group of someones, to agree with Him by paving the way for His coming in prayer. The Biblical record reveals the Lord descended with His presence on Nineveh, Antioch, Ephesus, and Jerusalem as well as other cities.

The thought resounds: **why not here; why not now?**

It is possible because our heavenly Father wants to exalt His Son over our community. There is not a formula to accomplish this, but there are some things we should give ourselves to as we invite Him to come.

Christian researchers have discovered that communities that are experiencing God's abiding presence have five things in common.

1. Persevering spiritual leadership
2. United efforts of prayer
3. Reconciliation,
4. Compassion
5. Evangelism

Find out who the spiritual leaders of our community are and pray for them regularly. Attend community-wide prayer events where Christians gather to pray for the community. Pray for social justice and compassion efforts to rise up and be successful. Join in public displays of your faith with other believers. Ask God to give wisdom about transforming the underlying issues in our

community where powers and principalities derive their power.

REFLECTION

- How will you play a role in bringing God's presence to our community?
- In what areas can you play a leadership role in providing united efforts of prayer with Christ followers, fighting for social justice, or showing Christ's compassion to our community?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I lift up my neighbors before You, asking for Your presence to fill the atmosphere so that they will hear You speak and see You work in their lives. Right now I pray for all of my neighbors by name. and I ask, God, that You will reveal Yourself to each one of them.