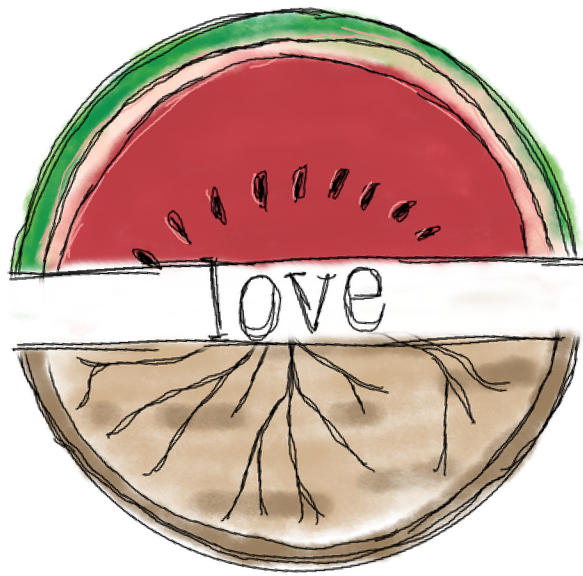


Introduction

At District Assembly this year, our DS invited us to consider how vital it could be to cultivate the Fruit of the Spirit. What would our witness look like in the world if we were people who were following Jesus, allowing God's grace to help us, and being filled with the Spirit so we bear fruit? To accomplish this we need to partner with God. She said, "While we don't believe in works righteousness, we also don't believe in passive discipleship. We get our hands dirty in the soil with our God who is the gardener." This document is a way for us to partner with God in our own transformation! Each month you will be provided with a variety of tools to help cultivate the Fruit of the Spirit. You can use these personally or with a group.

The format is a shared spiritual practice and then a three-fold invitation to go deeper--deeper in Scripture, deeper with others, and going deeper with self. You will also find a variety of book recommendations to help you to explore the fruit that is being studied each month.

The truth is Galatians 5 says the "fruit" of the Spirit, not the "fruits." This matters because we are to allow God to help us cultivate all of them, not just the easy ones, not just the ones we like, but we are to be people who bear all the fruit of the Spirit. Join us on this adventure with God as we seek to go deeper together.



Shared Practice

Scripture to read: 1 Corinthians 13

Questions to ask while reading: What do I read here that seems obvious about love? What is surprising about love? What seems impossible? What comes easy to me? What would I like to work on when it comes to loving more?

Practice: Take a few moments to write a letter to God. This can take a variety of forms--it could be in the form of a prayer or addressed to God like you might write a letter or email to a friend. What would you like to say to God about love? What don't you understand? How would you express your love for God? What would you like God to help you to cultivate when it comes to being a more loving person? What might you need to confess about how you haven't always lived into the greatest command--love God and love people?

Praying with others:

Gather with a small group and read this passage together. You can use the questions to guide discussion with one another and then quietly write letters to God together. If anyone is willing, you can share the letters you wrote. This can be a beautiful way to build relationships, give testimony, and hold each other accountable. Take time to pray with one another about how you can love more this month. Try some of the practices listed below and then share with each other how it is going!



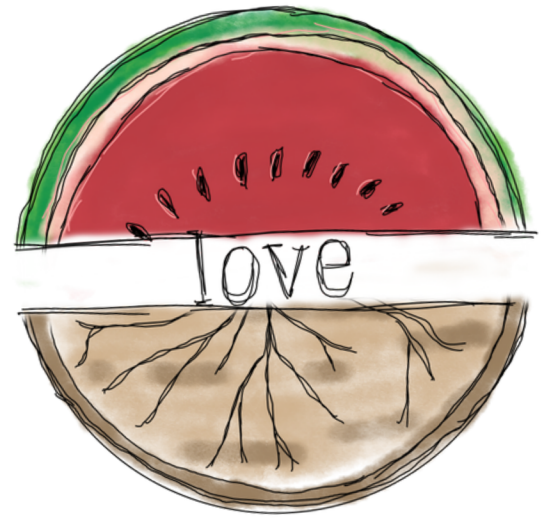
Going Deeper with Scripture: The Fruit of the Spirit of Love



How do these videos challenge, encourage, or shape your understanding of love from a Biblical perspective?

Going Deeper with Others and Self:

The Fruit of the Spirit of Love



Going Deeper With Others:

We can't really say we are loving God or people if we aren't practicing love. So here are some practical ideas to do this month:

- Choose five people in your community, church, or family to show love to. What might you say to these people that would show them how much you appreciate their presence in your life?
- Pray for your enemies. Who really bothers you? Can you try praying for him/her? Every time you think of this person pray. Or set a specific time each day to intentionally pray for this person. Don't have words? Try praying this slowly and deceptively: "God your love wouldn't let me stay your enemy. Help me to love (insert name) as you love."
- Loving Acts: What are some ways you can show love to grocery store workers, restaurant servers, or other people in the service industry? Before going into the store or a business consider praying: "God, help me to see someone who needs to be shown your love." Act on the guidance of the Spirit.

Going Deeper with Self:

Jesus says that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mt 22). This presupposes that we actually have healthy self-love. Do you? Do you find it easier to know what you love about yourself or hate about yourself? Our self-talk can be limiting our love of others so let's challenge this with a prayer practice:

- When you find yourself saying or thinking hurtful words to yourself stop and start repeating these words—or ones you craft for yourself: "I am loved by God. I am not my worst mistake, sin, or failure. I am a child of God."
- Maybe post reminders in your home of the good words God is saying of you.
- Maybe you need to set reminders on your phone to make sure you take the time each day to be intentional in your love of self.

Resources to Help Cultivate Love

From the Church of the Nazarene--The Foundry Publishing

A Theology of Love, Mildred Bangs Wynkoop--In this seminal work on holiness Mildred Wynkoop brought to the forefront the understanding that holiness is relational. Here she explains that loving God and loving neighbor find articulate expression in the holy life--a life oriented in dynamic and loving relationship toward God that in turn reaches out and embraces others. A Theology of Love reinvigorated for new generations the meaning of John Wesley's concept of perfect love.

Economy of Love, The Foundry Publishing--In this five-week study, unpack what the patterns of God's kingdom look like compared to the patterns of our world. What is the value of enough, and how do we become more like the God who is close to the poor, the hungry, the meek, and the merciful? Economy of Love will challenge individuals to join in community, journeying together as they begin to consider a new standard of living--a personal economic threshold oriented not around the size of a monthly paycheck, but around the value of enough.

When Love Bends Down, Michael Lodahl--Throughout the Gospel of John, we see images of Christ who bends low to the ground in order to reach others. In When Love Bends Down, author Michael Lodahl examines four specific passages in the Gospel of John--Jesus scrawling in the dust, making mud from spittle to smear on a blind man's eyes, washing His disciple's feet, and cooking breakfast for his disciples--and shows how these help illustrate the fundamental truth that God was willing to bend down and dwell among us in order to reach us where we are. Lodahl emphasizes that by understanding the bent-down theology of Jesus we can better understand how the Church is called to a "bent-down" life together as Christ's body in the world today.

Other Resources:

Tattoos on the Heart, Father Greg Boyle--For twenty years, Gregory Boyle has run Homeboy Industries, a gang-intervention program located in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles, the gang capital of the world. In Tattoos on the Heart, he distills his experience working in the ghetto into a breathtaking series of parables inspired by faith.

The Road Back to You: An Enneagram Journey to Self Discovery, Ian Crohn and Suzanne Stabile--What you don't know about yourself can hurt you and your relationships—and even keep you in the shallows with God. Do you want help figuring out who you are and why you're stuck in the same ruts? The Enneagram is an ancient personality typing system with an uncanny accuracy in describing how human beings are wired, both positively and negatively. In The Road Back to You Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile forge a unique approach—a practical, comprehensive way of accessing Enneagram wisdom and exploring its connections with Christian spirituality for a deeper knowledge of ourselves, compassion for others, and love for God.