

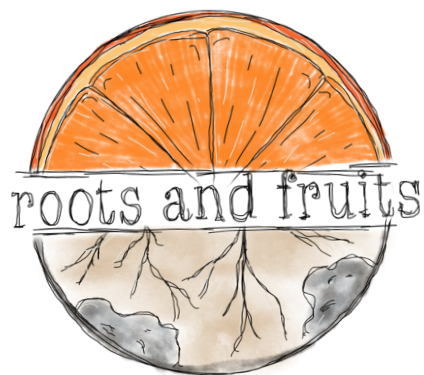


Introduction

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:

What does it mean to be gentle?

Some people believe that gentleness isn't for everyone. Some believe that to be gentle is to be weak.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 11:28-30 that He is gentle! If Jesus is gentle, then all of us, men and women, young and old, long-time Christian and new Christian, should seek to be gentle as well.

As a shared practice this month I would invite you to commit that passage of Scripture to memory. When you are tempted to be harsh with someone repeat this Scripture as a reminder that the Lord of your life is inviting us to a different way of living. Repeat this Scripture throughout the day to help you to be reminded that the call of following God isn't meant to be an impossibly heavy burden! We are offered the grace of God to enable us to be like Jesus. As we encounter others and share our faith with them let's remember that it is this kind of faith:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”



Deeper in Scripture: Being Gentle requires us to understand what it means to be made in the Image of God. It also requires us to recognize that in those we may have a hard time being gentle with. Part of being the holy people of God is to be gentle. Take some time to dig into this resource to understand what it means to be made in the image of God and how that should impact how we live our lives:



Deeper with others: What are some ways you can practice gentleness with people in your family, your workplace, your church, and your neighborhood as you reflect on the Image of God? Write those down and at the end of each day come to God in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to search you to see if you have allowed God to cultivate gentleness in you.

Deeper with self: What are some things you beat yourself up about over and over again? As we are thinking about the image of God in all of us we need to remember that we need to be gentle with ourselves too. We are all impacted by sin--ours and the sin of others who have harmed us--we all face brokenness, we all need God's grace to restore the image of God in us. Be gentle with yourself. Invite God to heal you and to be gracious with yourself. This doesn't mean we don't take sin seriously. But if we want to be filled with God's Spirit we can't keep holding on to self-hatred, negative self-talk, and legalism. We need to allow God to heal and transform us so there is room for the Spirit to come and continue to make us like Jesus!

Resources to Help Cultivate Gentleness

From the Church of the Nazarene--The Foundry Publishing

Reflecting the Image, Dr. Carla Sunberg, et al. What do people see when they look at us? Someone who reminds them of Jesus? Reflecting the Image is about moving closer to Christ so that we reflect his image brilliantly, as if in a mirror. It's about getting so immersed in our relationship with Jesus that when people see us, they see him. The closer we are to him, the greater is his reflection in us. Drawing on Scripture and personal experiences, Reflecting the Image is an inspiring call to the individual and the church as a whole to turn completely to God and allow his grace to restore us fully to Christ's image. Allow him to polish you so that when others see you, they see him instead.

Discovering Christian Holiness, Dr. Diane Leclerc. Is Wesleyan-Holiness theology still relevant for the twenty-first century? Does Wesleyan-Holiness theology—as a vital, experiential, living and breathing theology—still exist?

This study of the doctrine of Holiness examines its biblical, historical, and theological foundations, as well as the importance of the holiness life in the twenty-first century. Written with solid biblical evidence and historical insight, Discovering Christian Holiness will supply you with an understanding and awareness of holiness and its breadth, depth, and practicality.

Other Resources:

The Allure of Gentleness, Dallas Willard. The revered Christian author whose bestselling classics include The Divine Conspiracy, and The Spirit of Discipline provides a new model for how we can present the Christian faith to others. When Christians share their faith, they often appeal to reason, logic, and the truth of doctrine. But these tactics often are not effective. A better approach to spread Christ's word, Dallas Willard suggests, is to use the example of our own lives. To demonstrate Jesus's message, we must be transformed people living out a life reflective of Jesus himself, a life of love, humility, and gentleness. This beautiful model of life—this allure of gentleness—Willard argues, is the foundation for making the most compelling argument for Christianity, one that will convince others that there is something special about Christianity and the Jesus we follow.