



FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

*Love*



FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT  
DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL



*Love*

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## HOW TO USE THESE JOURNALS

What difference would it make to your faith if you could hear the Holy Spirit as he prayed for you?

Romans 8:26 reminds us, “The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” As you begin this journal set, remember that the God of all grace is for you, desiring to grow you into his likeness. His Son, Jesus, is at work interceding for you right now through the power of his Holy Spirit. What a blessing and a privilege!

So, as you begin, remember that you are not alone. God is with you in this moment. He surrounds you, and he has planned that you would open these journals right now.

It might be helpful to keep a few other things in mind:

*First, proceed prayerfully.* Even the ability to turn these pages comes from God, and he alone can give growth and bear fruit through his living and active Word (John 15:7; 1 Cor. 3:7; Heb. 4:12). We do not earn brownie points in God’s sight by our diligence. Rather, our acceptance and adoption into God’s family — his everlasting love for us — spur us onward to holiness. We come to his Word and presence because Jesus first came to us, accomplishing everything we could not. Even his Spirit, who moves in us to bear fruit, is a gift of his grace.

So begin each entry with prayer. Ask the Spirit to open your eyes to see wonderful things in his precious Word (Ps. 119:18),

to change your heart through it (Ps. 119:36), and to bear much good fruit within you and through you (Ps. 119:32). Enjoy spending time with the eternal God who draws near to the humble in heart (Ps. 138:6; James 4:8).

*Next, proceed personally.* The way you interact with these journals is completely up to you! There is no one right way to use them. You might read and journal in order of the virtues, or you might turn to those virtues that seem most pressing right now. Perhaps you want to keep notes and insights in a study Bible and use only the prayer sections. Maybe you want to read and reflect alongside a friend. Or maybe you want to do one journal at a time, interspersed with other Bible reading plans, and spread them out over time. As you meditate on God's Word, feel the freedom to respond however the Holy Spirit leads you (Ps. 119:24).

*Finally, proceed proactively.* The whole point of this journal set (and the entire point of Scripture) is that we would know and love Jesus more (Luke 24:27). He is the heart of our pursuit—and, when we encounter Jesus and see his beautiful holiness, he changes us! We now want to be doers of the Word, not hearers only (James 1:22). We want to be proactive, resolving in the Spirit's power and strength to respond to God's Word with faith and obedience (Ps. 119:1–8).

Using the Insights and Prayer sections, consider how God is calling you to depend on him and to follow him, and then ask for his help to bear his Spirit's fruit. He delights to answer you.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you and make you fruitful (Gal. 6:18).

## INTRODUCTION

*The fruit of the Spirit is a gift of God,  
and only He can produce it.*

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Many of us love a good homemade pie. Whether apple, berry, or peach, a homemade pie is the result of a specific process in the kitchen. The baker arranges and prepares her ingredients, presses out the dough, creates a suitable filling, and adds a lattice crust, and — voilà! — the finished product is a delight to the eyes and the taste buds.

The fruit of the Spirit is not like a homemade pie. But how many of us think of things in this way? Start with some *love*, add a bit of *joy* and *peace*, fill with *patience* and *goodness*, and top with some *self-control*, and — voilà! — we hope we got the recipe right. We trust that all our efforts are enough. We pray that the finished product is a delightful (and fruitful) Christian life.

### **Fruit Pie or Fruitful Tree?**

But God's Word tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is precisely that: *of the Spirit*. It is not "of us." Rather than picturing the Spirit's fruit, then, as a homemade pie that depends on its ingredients, we are to picture it as a tree:

[The blessed man] is like a tree  
planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.  
In all that he does, he prospers. (Ps. 1:3)

A fruitful tree is dependent on external factors to survive and thrive. It bears fruit because it is well hydrated, supplied for, and nourished through its roots. Everything a tree needs it receives from outside itself. Even a very active process such as photosynthesis involves air, sunlight, and water. God's Word is telling us that believers are like trees: fully dependent on him for any growth and fruitfulness. A holy life in Christ produces holy, good fruit.

### The Fruit of the Spirit Is . . .

As you begin this prayer journal, consider your present thinking about the fruit of the Spirit. Do you tend to think of it as a home-made pie, which depends on your own efforts and a combination of the right ingredients? Or do you think of a fruit-bearing tree that relies on its sources of nourishment to flourish? The differences are enormous: worship rather than legalism, prospering versus exhaustion, joy instead of frustration. When it comes to this important spiritual reality, we will want to have the mind of Christ and a heart deeply rooted in his words. We will want to be like a tree.

Our anchor text for these journals comes from the book of Galatians:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal. 5:22–23)

The apostle Paul wrote these familiar words to a church family struggling to keep believing the good news about Jesus (1:6–7). The church was being persuaded by false teachers to follow certain rules (specifically, circumcision) in order to be accepted by God (6:15). With great passion for the truth Paul reminds them, however, that “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love” (5:6).

What counts in the Christian life? “Faith working through love.” In other words, *genuine faith bears good fruit*. Paul is reminding us that it is only through faith in Christ that we are accepted by God (2:16) and adopted as his children (4:6–7). And therefore it is only by faith in Christ that we receive the promised Spirit, who bears his good and delightful fruit in us (4:6, 5:18).

The fruit of the Spirit is precisely that: *of the Spirit*. It is like a tree, not a pie.

### Searching Questions

As we open these prayer journals and root ourselves in God’s nourishing Word — as we seek to be fruitful believers — we find an invitation to examine our hearts. Paul poses at least two searching questions to the Galatian church that are still relevant to us today.

#### *Have I Turned to a Different Gospel? (Gal. 1:6)*

Any modification of the gospel message will distort our grasp of how we become fruitful people. This was the Galatians’ problem. Do we firmly believe that we are “justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law” (2:16)? Or are we hoping that our good works will save us? In other words, our eternal hope must be rooted in who Jesus is and what he has done, not in what we are doing.



The gospel (or “good news”) tells us that Jesus, the Lord of all creation, is making everything right concerning sin and will rescue us from sin and all its effects as we put our trust in him. The gospel does not tell us to “bear some fruit to earn your salvation” (the pie); it declares, “Enjoy your salvation in Christ, and then bear his fruit” (the tree). Turning to a different gospel results in discouragement (2:11–14) and possibly even spiritual death (3:10). But holding fast to Christ’s true gospel is life (2:20), freedom (2:4–5), and fruitfulness (6:8–9).

*Having Begun by the Spirit, Am I Now Being Perfected by the Flesh?  
(Gal. 3:3)*

Perhaps you would say that you believe the true gospel but tend to drift into self-sufficiency (4:9), works-based righteousness (5:2), and therefore a burdensome form of Christianity (5:7). Paul reminds the Galatians (and us) that nothing can be added to our salvation (3:5). We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus (1:1–5). That is all!

However, this does not mean we do nothing (5:16). As with a tree’s active photosynthesis, we are called to “keep in step with the Spirit” (5:25), which proves that our faith in Jesus is genuine (John 15:8). But we must be careful; it is always possible to slip into legalism, thinking we can somehow earn God’s favor. However, just as we received “the promised Spirit through faith” at the moment we believed (Gal. 3:14), so we must “stand firm . . . through the Spirit, by faith” every moment until Jesus returns (5:1–6). We continue as we first began: by the Holy Spirit’s love and power (3:3).

**A Fruitful People**

The fruit of the Spirit reflects the very heart of God – for it is *his Spirit* who produces all his graces within us. We see this most

clearly on display in Jesus, whose entire earthly life was empowered and made fruitful by God's Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18), making him our perfect substitute, compassionate brother, and faithful high priest. When we are redeemed by Christ from the curse of the law, we receive adoption as sons, and God sends the Spirit of Jesus into our hearts (Gal. 4:3-7). What more could we desire?

And what happens when a child of God is rooted in Christ and filled with his Spirit? She bears his fruit. She becomes fruitful. Such a person is not like a fruit pie but like "a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers" (Ps. 1:3).



## REFLECTIONS ON LOVE

What is love? Is it something we fall into? Something we feel? Is love based on the loveliness of its recipient, or does it tell us more about the lover? *Love* is a familiar and favorite word, used many ways to describe affection. But not all loves are created equal. Hopefully our love for family and friends means something more than our love for coffee or vacation or puppies!

The first virtue of the fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22). If bearing the Holy Spirit's fruit comes from being connected to him and nourished by him ("like a tree planted by streams of water," Ps. 1:3), then this tells us vital truth about what love is.

### A Divine Reality

Perhaps the better question is, "*Who* is love?" First John 4:8 says, "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because *God is love*." In the Bible, love has a name. Before time God has eternally existed in three persons, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — what we call the Trinity. The Trinity is a picture of everlasting relational happiness, since Father, Son, and Spirit have always loved one another with perfection. Think about the healthiest, most loving relationship you have, one that brings mutual enjoyment. Now imagine an intimacy with no limits and infinite happiness with a companion who never disappoints!

This is what God enjoys in himself among Father, Son, and Spirit: unconditional love, unrestricted delight, and fullness of joy. Sweet fellowship, perfect companionship.<sup>1</sup> Love is simply who God is.

Love is also what God commands. Jesus was asked, “Which is the great commandment in the Law?” And what was his answer? “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:36–39). The most important way for us to respond to our loving God is to love him in return, and then to pour out his lavish love upon others. Simple, right?

### A Divine Predicament

Simple, but not easy. Our love—the love that God created us from and for—has been severely afflicted by sin. In our flesh we reject the God who is love, and we cannot possibly obey his great commandment. Sin has turned us inward, causing us to love ourselves and whatever might serve us, rather than loving other people.

Sin has corrupted our communion with God *and* our ability to keep his commandments. The result? We are faced with a tricky situation: If God is love, and if God commands us to love, but we cannot, then what is the answer? What is our hope?

The prayer of a believer named Augustine gives us understanding: “God, command what you will, and give what you command!”<sup>2</sup> We need the God of love to fulfill in us his command to love. We need him to give us what we do not have in our own hearts. We need him to bear the fruit of his Spirit within us—the Spirit of love (Rom. 5:5, 15:30; Col. 1:8).

1 Excerpts on the Trinity were taken from Kristen Wetherell, *Humble Moms: How the Work of Christ Sustains the Work of Motherhood* (Nashville: B&H, 2022), 18.

2 This is one paraphrase of Augustine’s famous statement.

### A Divine Promise

In Galatians Paul addresses this divine predicament (Gal. 3:15–29). Paul says that, unless we obey every bit of the law, we are guilty of violating all of it. How many of us can truthfully say we have loved God and our neighbor as fully as he calls us to do? We know our love falls short of our gloriously loving God. We know our love toward others falls short too.

Our hope for love, then, is rooted in God's giving us what he commands of us, in the fulfillment of a promise he made to his people when their loving obedience was sorely lacking: "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33).

God has promised to write his law of love on human hearts. He promises to give us what he commands of us, making his love both a possibility and a desire. But how?

### A Divine Possibility

Someone would need to obey the Great Commandment and keep God's law — all of it — in order for God's covenant promise to his people to be fulfilled. This was Jesus' mission: "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (John 14:31).

Jesus lays down his life for God's people, bearing the penalty for our loveless hearts. Then he takes his life up again (10:17), giving the promised Spirit and implanting within us new, loving hearts. Only Jesus — God's love incarnate — can make God's great command possible for unlovely and unloving people such as we are. "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (15:13).

## A Divine Desire

In addition, only God's promised Spirit can make his great command our holy desire, writing God's law of love on our hearts (Jer. 31:33; Rom. 6:17). Now we love God! Now we want to love our neighbors! Now sin — a lack of love — grieves us. God changes us by pouring his love into our hearts through the promised Spirit (Rom. 5:5), who regenerates us (Titus 3:5), makes us new creations (2 Cor. 5:17), and then causes us to pour out the love we have first received (Ezek. 36:27). "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

What does this love look like?

- Love seeks to obey God's Word (John 14:15).
- Love forgives and covers sins (Eph. 4:32; 1 Pet. 4:8).
- Love is patient, gentle, and kind (1 Cor. 13:4).
- Love thinks of others and puts them first (Phil. 2:1–3).
- Love hopes the best in other people (1 Cor. 13:7).
- Love aims to serve and sacrifice (Mark 10:45).

This is not an exhaustive list; love goes on and on. As a tree bears good fruit when it is rooted and nourished, so we will love as God's Spirit of love does his work within us. A few questions we might ask God (and perhaps a trusted believer) include these: Am I growing in love? How am I seeing God's perfect love reflected increasingly in me? What opportunities do I have to mature in Christ's love, toward both him and my neighbor?

Praise God that our predicament of love is not without his glorious answer: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9).

*DAILY SCRIPTURE  
REFLECTIONS*



## Psalm 36:5–12

- 5 Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens,  
your faithfulness to the clouds.
- 6 Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;  
your judgments are like the great deep;  
man and beast you save, O LORD.
- 7 How precious is your steadfast love, O God!  
The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of  
your wings.
- 8 They feast on the abundance of your house,  
and you give them drink from the river of your  
delights.
- 9 For with you is the fountain of life;  
in your light do we see light.
- 10 Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you,  
and your righteousness to the upright of heart!
- 11 Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me,  
nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.
- 12 There the evildoers lie fallen;  
they are thrust down, unable to rise.



**2. Insights**

As you reread the passage, consider what it says about who God is and what it looks like to live a life of faith and obedience to him. Note any questions you have and write down answers you find in trusted study resources.

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**3. Summary**

In one to three sentences, summarize the main point of this passage.

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**4. Prayer**

Pour your heart out to the Lord, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you praise him, confess to him, listen to him, and trust in him.

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## Lamentations 3:16–24

- 16 He has made my teeth grind on gravel,  
and made me cower in ashes;
- 17 my soul is bereft of peace;  
I have forgotten what happiness is;
- 18 so I say, “My endurance has perished;  
so has my hope from the LORD.”
- 19 Remember my affliction and my wanderings,  
the wormwood and the gall!
- 20 My soul continually remembers it  
and is bowed down within me.
- 21 But this I call to mind,  
and therefore I have hope:
- 22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;  
his mercies never come to an end;
- 23 they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.
- 24 “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,  
“therefore I will hope in him.”