



Touching Lives
with James Merritt

TASTY

SERIES OVERVIEW

In this series, we are going to take a closer look at the fruit of the Spirit we should be bearing as followers of Christ. Now, you might be asking, “Why does God want us to bear fruit?” He wants us to bear fruit because He wants our lives to be **tasty**. In other words, He wants us to live lives that are so attractive that people are drawn to us like a hungry man is drawn to a plate of good food. The Lord wants us to live lives that are both good to others and good for others, and we do that by living according to the Fruit of the Spirit.

SERIES VERSE

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.”

Galatians 5:22-23

SUPPORTING VERSES

Psalm 1:3

Proverbs 11:30

Matthew 7:20

John 15:5

John 13:35

TASTY

PART 1: For the Love

1 Corinthians 13:1-8

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Which attribute of love (i.e. patience, kindness, etc.) would you like to see God develop further in the way you love others?
2. Is there someone in your life you have difficulty loving? What is keeping you from showing this person unconditional, or agape, love?
3. What is something you can do this week to show love to someone?

NOTES

TASTY

PART 2: In Joy

Galatians 5:22, John 16:16-22, John 15:11

Unfortunately, most of us don't initially think of joy as a word to describe God. On the contrary, many people think God is sitting up in heaven waiting to punish them as soon as they make a mistake. But in his Old Testament book, Zephaniah encourages us saying, "The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17).

The word delight in that verse literally means to jump up and down. Our God is a God of joy, so much so that He is jumping up and down, elated that we are His children. The Lord models joy for us in this way and so many others, so let us make the decision to be joyful as well. Remember, joy doesn't come from your circumstances. It comes from knowing that God is over your circumstances. In grief, there's God. In loss, there is the Lord. In suffering, there is the Savior. So let's all rejoice!

NOTES

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What are some circumstances you're currently dealing with that are robbing you of your joy?
2. Have you been trying to find joy in something else rather than finding joy in the Lord, such as a job or a relationship? If so, what is it?
3. What is one step you can take this week to shift your focus to the Lord, rather than focusing on your circumstances?

NOTES

TASTY

PART 3: Rest in Peace

Philippians 4:4-7

OVERVIEW

Today, we're going to be talking about the third fruit of the Spirit - peace. It's easy to think that peace would be a constant companion for those who are followers of Jesus, but unfortunately that's not necessarily the case. There are pressures, problems, and people we deal with every day that can threaten to rob us of our peace. But we must not forget that peace can be found when we are confident that God can relieve our pressures, solve our problems, and handle the people in our lives.

KEY POINTS

Paul, the author of Galatians where the fruit of the Spirit are listed, dealt with his own exhaustive list of pressures, problems and people, yet he seemed to be at perfect peace. How did he do it? He felt peace through four of the simplest exercises, and you can do the same.

1. Rejoice

Like we talked about in the last message in regards to joy, our circumstances should not determine our ability to bear the fruit of the Spirit. This fruit comes directly from the Lord, who is so much bigger than anything we deal with on this earth.

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Sure, it's difficult to rejoice when life gets hard, but this verse serves as a reminder that we should rejoice always, not just when rejoicing comes easy. You aren't going to find a lot of joy in big pressures, tough problems, and difficult people, but you can always find joy in the Lord.

2. Relax

Many of us struggle with feeling at peace because not only are we trying to face the stresses and difficulties of everyday life, but we're trying to face them on our own. But as Christ-followers, we must remember that we are never alone. We can wake up every morning, confident that God is with us, and that He is within us. Psalm 73:28 reminds us of this truth, "But as for me, the nearness of God is my good." Let us not forget that peace is not the absence of difficulties; peace is the presence of God even in the midst of difficulties.

3. Release

Once we realize that God is always with us, we must then learn to release whatever is robbing us of our peace. Paul tells us in Philippians 4:6, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." In other words, don't worry about anything and pray about everything.

NOTES

TASTY

PART 3: Rest in Peace

Philippians 4:4-7

Consider these three basic questions:

1. Do you believe God loves you and cares about your problems?
2. Do you believe God is powerful enough to handle all of your problems?
3. Do you believe God wants to grow you through your problems?

If you answered “yes” to these questions, make the decision today to turn your problems over to the Lord. He can handle them. You can’t. He never said you could, but He always said He would.

4. Rest

After Paul tells us to stop worrying and start praying, he says, “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). This peace Paul is talking about passes all understanding because it is a peace that only the Lord can give. It is the type of peace that will have other people asking, “How do you have such peace in the middle of what you’re going through?”

You don’t have to die to rest in peace. You can rest in peace even when life seems like it’s falling apart. No matter what comes your way, no matter how strong the pressure, how big the problem, or how difficult the people, you can rejoice, relax, release, and then you can rest in God-given peace.

NOTES

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is robbing you of your peace right now? Is it pressure to meet a deadline or live up to an expectation? Is it a problem, like a job-loss or a diagnosis? Or is it a person with whom you have a difficult relationship?
2. What is keeping you from releasing this circumstance or this person over to the Lord?
3. Which of the four exercises (rejoice, relax, release, rest) do you struggle with the most? What is one thing you could start doing today to help you better implement that exercise into your life?

NOTES

TASTY

PART 4: Hurry Up and Wait

Psalm 37:7-9, Job 42:1-6, James 5:7-8

OVERVIEW

Two of the most frustrating words in the English language are, “Be patient.” Patience is not an easy thing to master and is something many of us struggle with. But patience is also a fruit of the Spirit that we are called to bear as followers of Jesus. When we lack patience, we are basically lacking trust in God and His ability to take care of us. So the key to having patience is being willing to trust God to move His process, work His plan, and accomplish His purpose.

KEY POINTS

There are definitely “patience poppers” that can sour this fruit in your life. Let’s look at what they are and how to handle them.

1. Problems Will Try Your Patience

We all face a variety of problems in life. Relationship problems, career problems, financial problems, health problems – the list goes on and on. But problems are not meant to defeat you, depress you, or discourage you. They are meant to develop you.

Every difficulty you face is an opportunity for you to trust God. It’s an opportunity for you to hear from God, to believe God, and to learn to exercise patience, believing that He will guide you on how to best handle the problem you’re facing.

2. People Will Test Your Patience

Think back to the first fruit of the Spirit we discussed – love. When Paul describes love in 1 Corinthians 13:4, he starts by saying, “Love is patient.” If you have difficult people in your life who try your patience, the only way you will ever learn to be patient with them is to love them. Scripture makes it very clear that we are to love everyone. So if we are to love everyone, then we should be patient with everyone, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

3. Persistence Will Toughen Your Patience

The reason why God allows us to face difficult people and demanding problems is so that He can grow our faith and develop our maturity. James tells us in his book, “...the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:3-4). In other words, patience is a faith-building exercise.

When we get impatient and frustrated with God, we are basically saying, “Lord, I want you on my timetable, and I want you to do things according to my clock and my calendar.” But think about how patient He has been with you. If God had lost His patience with us as sinners, we would all be doomed. Thankfully, the Lord shows us patience and grace every single day, because every day we are given on this earth is a chance for us to grow in our trust and love for our Heavenly Father. So if God can be that patient with us, how much more should we be patient with the tough problems and difficult people that come our way.

NOTES

TASTY

PART 4: Hurry Up and Wait

Psalm 37:7-9, Job 42:1-6, James 5:7-8

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is something you are waiting on right now?
2. What are you learning about God and about yourself as you navigate this season of waiting?
3. Was there a time in the past where you had to wait on something longer than you expected to, but looking back now, you see why the Lord had you wait for it? How can that time in your life serve as an encouragement to you today as you're waiting for something different?

NOTES

TASTY

PART 5: RAOK (Random Act Of Kindness)

Proverbs 3:4, Proverbs 19:22

OVERVIEW

The next fruit of the Spirit we are going to cover is kindness. Kindness is something this world could use a lot more of. You will be hard pressed to ever go a day in your life where you don't meet someone who needs a kind word. Jesus modeled kindness so well during His time on earth, never turning anyone away who wanted to see Him or talk to Him. He always had time to speak a kind word or do a kind deed, and as His children, we should desire to do the same.

KEY POINTS

There's an old saying that goes, "Kill them with kindness." A lot of truth can be found in that statement, because you can kill animosity, bitterness, anger, and hard feelings just by being kind. Here are three secrets on how you can kill people with kindness.

1. Show Kindness With Your Deeds

Even the smallest act of kindness can go a long way in a relationship. Tenderness can motivate people to do things that toughness never can. For instance, think about the different leaders you've interacted with in your life. The great leaders do not drive people with the crack of a whip. They lead people with the warmth of a kind word. Jesus took that exact approach, and that is why so many people gravitated towards Him.

2. Share Kindness With Your Words

While showing kindness with your deeds is super important, it is not the only way to bear this fruit. Kindness can also be shown to others through your words. This is particularly important in the context of hard conversations. You can be honest with someone, or give someone constructive criticism, and still be kind. In fact, that's exactly what you should do. Confrontation on its own is not unkind, but the manner in which confrontation is handled can be if we're not careful. You can confront wrong doing. You can bring correction to a situation. You can tell the truth, but you should do all of those things through the filter of kindness.

3. Sow Kindness With Your Heart

At its core, kindness is really just reaching out to other people with God's love, doing all that we can to help them experience God the way we do. So many people in this world are hostile not only to what we believe, but also to the One we believe in. But if we reach out to these people, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can show them kindness in a way they may have never experienced before. Kindness is something we give, even to people who don't deserve it. We weren't deserving of kindness either, but God showed us kindness anyways when He sent His Son to die for us. So let's treat the people around us unconditionally as well, and kill them with kindness.

NOTES

TASTY

PART 5: RAOK (Random Act Of Kindness)

Proverbs 3:4, Proverbs 19:22

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. When was the last time someone was kind to you? How did it make you feel? What kind of impression did their kindness leave?
2. What is one way you can show someone kindness with your deeds this week by performing a random act of kindness?
3. What is one way you can show someone kindness with your words this week, maybe to someone who hasn't necessarily been kind to you?

NOTES

TASTY

PART 6: For Goodness Sake

Galatians 5:22, Micah 6:8

OVERVIEW

When a person comes to faith in Jesus, though at the time he might not realize it, the Holy Spirit of God comes into his life and takes up residence. From that point on, God wants that Christian to walk in the Spirit and bear fruit through his life. Part of that fruit is goodness, which is the fruit of the Spirit we are going to discuss today. We must first be good before we can start doing good. And in order to be good, we must realize that goodness can only come from the Lord, not from anything we've done. Once we acknowledge this truth, we can begin showing goodness to the people around us.

KEY POINTS

Goodness is loving the right things and living the right way. With this definition in mind, let's look at three barometers you can use to measure just how good you really are.

1. Goodness Is An Action That Helps Others

Goodness is simply godliness in action. The Lord defines this type of godliness clearly in His Word. "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:17-18). Part of being good and godly is helping those who are in need. It's doing the right thing, at the right time, in the right way, for the right people. Goodness means treating others the way Jesus would treat them, with love, care, honor, and respect.

2. Goodness Is An Affection That Cares For Others

In his Old Testament book, Micah says that if you are good, you will "love mercy" (Micah 6:8). In other words, you will love when you have the opportunity to show mercy to others or help others find mercy when they need it. Loving mercy is a way we can care for the people around us, and therefore is a way for us to bear the fruit of goodness.

Do you know why loving mercy and giving mercy is so important? Because the opposite of mercy is bitterness. There would be a lot less bitterness, strife, and conflict in our world, our nation, our homes, and our neighborhoods if we would care for others by falling in love with mercy.

3. Goodness Is An Attitude That Inspires Others

The final requirement of goodness Micah talks about is to "walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Walking with the Lord is the real source of goodness. The more time you spend with God, growing and investing in your relationship with Him, the more goodness He will develop within you. And the more goodness that builds in your heart, the more goodness will manifest itself outwardly as you interact with the people around you.

NOTES

TASTY

PART 6: For Goodness Sake

Galatians 5:22, Micah 6:8

The good news is that the fruit of the Spirit ripens, but it never rots. No matter how good you are, as you grow in the Lord and walk humbly with Him, you will find that your goodness will get even better. And in doing so, you will inspire others to want that same goodness for themselves.

NOTES

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Who do you know that needs some mercy? Who do you know that needs your forgiveness, even though they may not necessarily deserve it? Are you willing to reach out to that person this week and extend mercy and goodness towards them?
2. When was the last time you showed goodness, or godliness, to someone else? What is something you can do this week to be good and help someone around you?
3. What are you doing in your everyday life to “walk humbly with your God?”

NOTES

TASTY

PART 7: Lifetime Opportunity

Matthew 25:14-30

OVERVIEW

The next fruit of the Spirit we are going to discuss is the fruit of faithfulness. Every one of us is given opportunities in this life to find God's will and do God's work. We are given opportunities to make a difference in the lives of other people, using the gifts and talents God has given us. In other words, we are given this life in order to be faithful to our Heavenly Father and the work He is calling us to do for His Kingdom. In Matthew 25, Jesus told a parable that illustrates the importance of faithfulness, and this is a parable we can all learn from in regards to how we should be faithful with our lives and our gifts.

KEY POINTS

If you're wondering, "How do I bear the fruit of faithfulness?", here are some things to think about to get you started.

1. Take Stock Of Your God-Given Ability

When Jesus begins the parable, He explains that a man, before heading out on a journey, gave each of his servants part of his wealth according to their abilities. The Lord has done the same for each of us. We each possess a set of God-given gifts, talents, and abilities. Some people have more abilities and talents than others, but each ability is equally important because they are each from the Lord.

It is not how much you have that matters to God; it is what you do with what you have that matters to Him. Sure, we don't all have equal abilities and talents, but we do all have equal opportunities to use them to honor God and bless others. What is inexcusable is not using your gifts and talents at all.

2. Take Advantage Of Your God-Given Opportunity

Every ability we are given comes with the expectation that it will be used when an opportunity presents itself. In His parable, Jesus goes on to explain that the servant who received five bags of gold put his money to work and multiplied it. The second servant who was given two bags of gold did the same. The third servant, who was given one bag, dug a hole and buried his bag in the ground.

This part of the story makes it very clear that when it comes to your God-given talents, you are either doing something for God, or you are doing nothing for God. The Lord doesn't expect the same result from every one of His children, but He does expect the same effort. God never compares you with anyone else. He compares you with you. He wants to see that you're being faithful to use what you've been given when you have the chance.

NOTES

TASTY

PART 7: Lifetime Opportunity

Matthew 25:14-30

3. Take Note Of Your God-Given Accountability

Jesus wraps up the parable by describing the master's response to each servant when he returns from his journey. When he sees the results from the first two men, he calls them "good and faithful" and rewards them. But when he sees what the third servant did, he calls him wicked and lazy.

How would you feel if you went to a bank, opened up a savings account and put \$1000 in the bank, and ten years later you came back and there was still only \$1000 in your account? Well, how do you think God feels when He gives you talents and abilities for you to use for His glory, and you fail to use them and invest them?

As a follower of Jesus, the best compliment you could ever receive is to one day hear your Master say to you, "Well done good and faithful servant." If that's something you want the Lord to say to you, you must make a point now to be faithful with the gifts, talents, and abilities He has given you. Don't worry about what He's given everyone else or what everyone else is accomplishing. Just be faithful with what you have. That's all your Heavenly Father expects of you.

NOTES

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Take some time to take stock of the gifts the Lord has given you. What God-given abilities do you have? How are you using those abilities for the glory of God and the good of others?
2. Would you say you are being faithful with your gifts, like the first two servants, or unfaithful, like the third servant? What is keeping you from using your God-given gifts when you have the chance?
3. What is one thing you can do this week to use one of your gifts or abilities to honor the Lord and bless someone else?

NOTES

TASTY

PART 8: Tender to the Touch

Galatians 5:23, Matthew 11:28-29

OVERVIEW

The next fruit of the Spirit from Paul’s list is gentleness. Another word that is often used synonymously with gentleness is meekness. Meekness can be defined as trusting God in every circumstance and treating other people in light of this trust. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells His disciples, “Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). In other words, Jesus is saying if you will be meek, you will be blessed and wind up with everything that matters. That is the complete opposite of what the world tells us, saying that you will be blessed if you have money, muscles, might, or missiles. But as we all know, we are not called to be like the world, but to be like Christ, and Jesus was the perfect example of gentleness and meekness.

KEY POINTS

Let’s talk about three ways we can exercise gentleness in our everyday lives.

1. We Should Emulate Gentleness

There is a common misconception that meekness goes hand in hand with weakness. But that couldn’t be further from the truth. Jesus was meek, but He was not weak. He was never afraid to stand up for what was right, nor was He afraid to stand against what was wrong. We should emulate this same type of gentleness, accompanied by our God-given strength and boldness. You can be strong and have convictions and speak up, yet you can do so with a spirit of gentleness.

2. We Should Cultivate Gentleness

As we start to emulate gentleness based on Jesus’ example, we must realize that having a spirit of gentleness begins with our relationship with God. Gentleness is when you can honestly come before the Lord and say, “I am going to surrender everything to you – my rights, my desires and my wants. I am going to surrender the way I react to other people no matter how they treat me. I am going to surrender my right to revenge, to retaliation, and my right to want what is best for me.”

To put it simply, gentleness is power under control, and this control comes from the Holy Spirit. When you allow the Spirit to have this type of power over you, you are going to begin bearing the fruit of gentleness.

3. We Should Demonstrate Gentleness

It is so important to understand a gentle person is not a passive person, but a proactive person. Meekness doesn’t affect so much what you do as it does how you do it. Peter gives an example of this principle, saying, “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (1 Peter 3:15-16).

NOTES

TASTY

PART 8: Tender to the Touch

Galatians 5:23, Matthew 11:28-29

You can still be active in your faith, strong in your convictions, and bold in your actions while demonstrating gentleness towards the people around you. Jesus did exactly that, setting an example with His life on earth that we all should follow. It was the spirit of gentleness that caused Jesus to go to a cross so that He could totally but tenderly forgive us for our sins. Let us walk in this same spirit of gentleness as we continue to follow Christ.

NOTES

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Is there a time you can recall having a conversation where you could have been more gentle? If you could go back, what would you do differently?
2. Is there a right or a desire you need to surrender in order to start walking out your faith in the spirit of gentleness? What steps can you begin to take to surrender that right or desire over to the Lord?

NOTES

TASTY

PART 9: Who Is In Control?

Galatians 5:19-25

OVERVIEW

Now we are going to talk about the final fruit of the spirit, which is self-control. If there is any fruit on the list where all of us are sometimes lacking, even the most disciplined of us, it would be this fruit. Whether you've eaten too much food, spent too much money, wasted too much time, or asked too many questions, there's some aspect of self-control we all struggle with. Thankfully, if you have accepted Christ and acknowledged that God is in control of you, then you can begin to learn to control yourself.

KEY POINTS

If you want to know how to begin to practice self-control, consider these steps.

1. Confront Your Self

The first thing to understand is that the battle going on within yourself and the desires you have that are contrary to God's desires for you goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. The sinful nature of human beings began there, and it is that sinful nature that causes us to want to call our own shots, do our own thing, and look out for number one.

If you're going to practice self-control, you must first acknowledge that your sinful nature is a problem. Until you recognize that your flesh is something that must be controlled on a daily basis, you will never be able to gain self-control.

2. Crucify Your Self

Once you've acknowledged that your sinful nature is a problem that needs to be controlled, you must crucify this part of your self. This comes from surrendering your life to Jesus. Paul explains this concept in Galatians 5:24 when he says, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires." It's going to go against your nature to get rid of your fleshly desires and wants, but doing so is the only way to practice self-control.

3. Control Your Self

If you want to practice self-control, once you've acknowledged and crucified the problem, you must begin to walk in the Spirit. That's the difference between being a follower of Jesus and not being a follower of Jesus. If you're not a Christ-follower, your self, or your sinful nature, calls the shots. If you are a Christ-follower, the Holy Spirit within you calls the shots. Paul says it this way in Galatians 5:25, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

One very common thing the Spirit may ask you to do in the realm of self-control is to wait. He may prompt you to hit the pause button, whether that means you pause for a few seconds before you say something on your mind, or you pause for a few days as you're considering a big decision. Regardless of how He leads you, you will never be led astray if you choose to walk in the way of the Holy Spirit. And even though it won't always be easy, you will never regret exercising self-control.

NOTES

TASTY

PART 9: Who Is In Control?

Galatians 5:19-25

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is one area of your life where you struggle to exercise self-control? Is it your finances? Your health? Your emotions? Your time?
2. Is there a desire coming from your sinful nature that needs to be crucified?
3. What is one thing you can begin doing this week to practice more self-control in this area?

NOTES

SERIES CONCLUSION

Let me remind you that none of these fruits of the spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control - are possible apart from the Son of God and the Spirit of God. Jesus died for you so you can die to you. Jesus was raised from the dead so you could live a life that is Tasty. When you give your life to the Son of God, He will give to you the Spirit of God, so you can be fruitful for the glory of God and live a life that will not only bless you, but be a blessing to others. You can live in such a way that people will always be happy to see you come and always sad to see you leave.



TRAVEL WITH

JAMES MERRITT

TO THE GREEK ISLES



GREECE TOUR

SPRING 2020

I would like to invite you in joining me on this incredible journey of retracing the footsteps of the Apostle Paul. This amazing trip will enable us to experience Philippi, Thessaloniki, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Crete, Patmos, and Ephesus. Together we will step into Bible days and walk alongside of Paul. The Holy Scriptures will come to life in unimaginable ways. I promise this will not only be a trip of a lifetime, but a life changing experience for all of us!

*in Christ,
James and Teresa Merritt*