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# FRUIT



**Love**



**8**

**Joy**



**22**

**Peace**



**38**

**Patience**



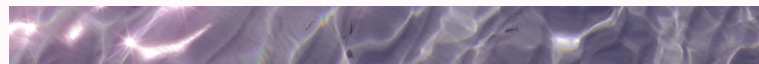
**58**

**Kindness**



**76**

**Goodness**



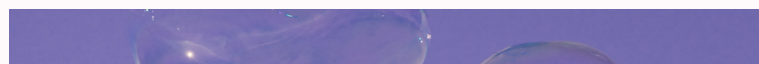
**90**

**Faithfulness**



**104**

**Gentleness**



**122**

**Self-control**



**138**



## INTRODUCTION

The sweet, seedy cocoons we call fruits are signals of nourished roots, ripened flesh, and new life. The Fruit of the Spirit contains similar meaning. It results from the Holy Spirit's dwelling with us, and us with it. It buds with our blossoming character, into maturity. And it bears within it, the seeds of a renewed reality.

From the Garden of Eden to the Age of Information, the Fruit of the Spirit blooms on all of God's story. To engage with it is to travel a terrain of delight, discipline, and destiny. It is to commune deeply with the Holy Spirit, allowing it to influence and imprint us. Paul does not describe the fruits as separate components of a cornucopia, but as a singular Fruit—one with nine shades, textures, and flavors.

What does it mean to bear this fruit today? This book is meant to refresh and refine our understanding of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Just as Paul juxtaposes this fruit with "acts of the flesh"

(Gal. 5:19-21), there are many constant, competing constraints that dry and damper our fruit: hatred, joylessness, anxiety, selfishness, violence, distrust, apathy, and lust. As we contemplate the beauty and challenge of fruit-bearing in a barren world, we give ourselves to the Spirit's leading and life. We reject the apparent fruits of worldly trees, and choose to abide in the garden of God. We proclaim a kingdom laden with this fruit.

It is tempting to confuse the fruit of the Spirit with standards of perfection, rather than reliable features of transformation. But as Paul exhorts us, let us remember our renouncement of the world and our commitment to Christ. The journey of fruit-bearing—both in horticulture and holiness—is slow, unglamorous, and lifelong. But on it, we walk with a welcome companion and advocate: the Holy Spirit.

As we read, may we read with the Spirit, growing in awareness of how God embodies this fruit and calls us to do the same. Amen.







01 **Love**





## INTRODUCTION

### *What is Love?*

The great thinkers and creatives of our world have long sought to understand, define, and discover love. Love somehow simultaneously applies to food, art, animals, people, places, and ideas. We make diverse claims of love—describing a tasty dish, nostalgic film, or our partners, or our cultures. Love manifests in deep appreciation, peace, solidarity, joy, loyalty, or even the sensation of “butterflies” in one’s stomach. And almost always, love occurs between people. It characterizes the aroma of a mother cooking dinner for her family, the warmth of a friend’s embrace in a moment of grief, or the delightful company of those we long to be with. Love comprises a galaxy of infinite possibility, but emerges singularly from its proud architect: *God*.

*“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”*

– 1 John 4:8 ESV

John’s simple yet weighty description of God begs the question: how can someone *be* Love? And how do we, mere moments in an infinite story, comprehend the possibility of relationship with *Love, the Person?*

*“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 ESV



We might begin by understanding that God loved us first. Amidst a hurting, chaotic, and fractured world, the sovereign God moves in. God does not wait for humanity to sort itself out, but rather rushes towards humanity and, compelled by love, becomes a part of it. It is this timeless miracle of incarnate love that most vividly directs us to understand Love, the Person.

When we love and receive love under the wisdom that “God is love,” our own experiences of love are given depth, substance, and richness. When we witness the birth of a child, a joyful union, or a cherished meal around the table, we experience love not only as a pleasant feeling—but as an experience of God. This love changes *everything*.





### THE CHIEF VIRTUE AND VESSEL

*“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

In Matthew 22:37-40, love is described as the greatest commandment on which “all the Law and the Prophets hang on.” In 1 Corinthians 13:13, love is considered greater than the virtues of faith and hope. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, love is described as more essential than the gifts of tongues, prophecy, faith, and sacrificial giving.

Every fruit of the Spirit is a good and beautiful expression of the person of God in us—yet love is elevated above the rest. Why is this? Latin priest St. Jerome, meditates on this question: “What deserves to hold the first place among the fruits of the Spirit if not love? Without love other virtues are not reckoned to be virtues. From love is born all that is good.”<sup>1</sup>





Love is the vessel in which all of the other fruits of the Spirit are held. When we experience joy, we love to be with God and others. When we participate in peace-making, we are enacting love in our world. When we practice patience, we become a presence of *love*. When we are kind to others, we are ambassadors of *love*. When we behave with gentleness, we interact through a posture of *love*. When we exercise self-control, we more fully understand *love*.

Love binds and begets the whole fruit of the Spirit. Love is *why* the other fruits have life. In these fruits, love becomes an orientation, energy, behavior, action, incarnation, and *person*. In our pursuit of virtue, we always begin in love.

### THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

God's love is realized in our everyday living through community. Love is actualized in the truth that we humans are bound together and committed to one another by an ethos of love.

On a trip to Louisville, Christian mystic and clergyman Thomas Merton shares:

*“In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like walking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness.”*<sup>2</sup>

At the center of love and community is the feeling of belonging. Though the depth of our individual lives overwhelm us—even to the point that we lose sight of others—we never stop belonging to something bigger than ourselves. When we love, we return to our state of belonging. We live in mutuality with others, sharing life rather than hoarding it. We see others as they truly are, beyond our fickle assumptions. We treasure our similarities and curiously explore our differences. And we discover that we are meant to belong in loving relationship with others.