

SPIRITUAL GROWTH REVIEW

The Fruit of the Spirit Is...



THE SECRETS OF BEING FRUITFUL

Memory Verse for this week: "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." Mark 12:29-31

1. How was your week? Was there anything that happened that we would want to celebrate or pray for with you? *Take 10-15 minutes to share life together. Take notes for prayer requests, and plan to follow up comments made in the weeks to come. :)*
2. Did you get a chance to watch the video podcast on love? What were the major takeaways for you from this discussion? *Don't spend too much time on this question but give everyone a chance to share if they choose to. We'll be diving deeper in our discussion!*
3. What did you think of the Fruit Inspection survey? What were some of your strongest and weakest areas according to the assessment? *Make a mental note of people's areas as much as you are able so that you might be able to encourage them in the weeks ahead. Affirm how you look forward to watching people grow and take steps of faith to bear fruit for the kingdom of God as we grow in maturity. Feel free to pass along feedback to Pastor Tim.*
4. Read **1 John 4:7-13**. 1 John 4:8 says that God is love (agape). What is a good definition of agape love? How would you put it into words for someone who has never heard about what God has done for them? *Agape love is an unconditional commitment to look out for the welfare of another, regardless of their performance. It is a decision and not an emotion. It is undeserved and sacrificial. It's probably not something that people have seen too much of in this world. We have the opportunity to show them God's love in tangible form.*
5. How have you seen this kind of love lived out in action around you? What does it look like? What might it look like if you were to reach out those around you? *Hopefully you have one or two stories of sacrificial love from your group members. It is atypical and not the norm. Sometimes people might make great sacrifices for others, often their children. If we were to love others this way, it might cost us a lot but would also be a great blessing to us in return.*
6. Consider **John 15:9-14**. What is the key to growing strong in our ability to love other people? *The key to loving people is to abide in the Spirit. The Spirit enlightens us to the will of God for what is going on around us and the Spirit gives us strength to overcome our sinful nature so that we can obey His commands. We must stay tuned-in to the heart of God so that we don't get dissuaded by the world or our flesh.*
7. What does it mean for us to abide in the Spirit? Is this possible? How can we consistently carry this out in our daily lives? *Abiding in the Spirit comes through regular realignment of our hearts to follow the will of God. This happens through prayer, Bible Study, journaling, wise counsel, and meditation on what God is teaching us. Abiding is a discipline that takes effort; it may be beneficial to develop a routine within our daily activities.*

8. Look at **Galatians 5:16-17**. How does our flesh relate to the reality of the Spirit of God living in us? Which is stronger? Why does living by the Spirit seem so incredibly difficult to carry out? *Our flesh is naturally strong within us due to our sinful nature. If we seek to abide in the Spirit, we will strengthen the Spirit's influence over our lives and the decisions that we make. Because we all have a fallen nature, sin has a tendency of holding us back and preventing us to desire the things of God. Abiding in the Spirit helps us to keep our priorities straight and our hearts passionate (refer also to Gal. 5:19-21).*
9. What happens when a believer chooses to live by the flesh instead of the Spirit? How does breaking His commandments affect our relationship with Him? *Jesus died on the cross to pay for the penalty of our sin. Even so, if we allow sin to reign in our bodies, it will affect our relationship with God (see Eph. 4:30). We can grieve the Holy Spirit and so limit the work that God is able to do in and through our lives. If we want to bear fruit for the Kingdom of God, if we want to live a life that pleases Him, then we must discipline ourselves to be obedient to His will.*
10. Read **Matthew 5:43-44**. What are your greatest hangups with loving the people around you? What fears prevent you from reaching out and caring for the needs in the lives of those around you? *Loving people can be messy. People can be hurtful and selfish and ignorant. It is a sacrifice to step out of our comfort zone and to step into someone else's sinful world to try and show them love. When our lives are comfortable, we may feel hesitant to allow someone else's problems to get in the way of that comfort. We may also just be ignorant of the needs around us or lacking in compassion. There are many selfish reasons to choose not to love, but God has demonstrated His will for us by modeling love and sacrifice.*
11. What makes it so hard for us to see people the way that God sees them? Are you able to do this when you look at people? How do we see beyond people's faults? Consider **Matthew 7:3-5**. *Our sin blinds us, to a degree, of the needs around us. Our pride skews our perspective and we do not see people as God does. Our selfish nature seeks to serve ourselves or protect our personal interests. People might be different, or they might just threaten the peace and stability of our comfortable lives. God calls us to love our brothers and sisters, but also to love our enemies (and all people) because He loves them.*
12. What is your best next step that you can take to better love people? *This will vary from person to person, but it is good to identify a specific step so that we can hold one another accountable for spiritual growth, or just to set our own goals. Perhaps we commit to pray for someone daily. We might need to become more aware of the needs around us. Maybe we identify three people who need to hear about Jesus and pray about how to reach them. We might make a phone call, write a card, invite someone out for coffee, visit them in the hospital or at their home. Step into their lives and watch for opportunities to love them.*
13. Why is love foundational for all of the other fruit of the Spirit? What makes it so special? *All other fruit stems off of the fruit of love. They are subcategories of love, so we cannot bear the other fruit if we do not have God's love in our hearts. If we have a heart that overflows with love, then we can build off of that love and produce other fruit in our lives. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (1 Cor. 13:13).*
14. What is one thing that you plan to do this week to better abide in the Spirit of God?

For this week: Check out the devotionals on love. Memorize the scripture this next week, and do your best to fulfill each daily application! Challenge the others in your group to do the same. Let's make the most of this series and grow into the image of Christ!