

DEVELOP YOUR STRENGTHS BY GROWING THE

Fruits of the Spirit



18 Daily Devotions Presented by:



**FOOD FOR
THE HUNGRY**

Introduction

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
- Galatians 5:22-23

Most Christians know about the Fruits of the Spirit, but developing them and applying them to your life can be a challenge. In 18 short devotionals, you'll discover:

- What unconditional love is and how to show it as God does
- How to love everyone – even those who aren't lovable
- The true meaning of peace and how to cultivate it in your life
- Tips for practicing and developing patience
- How to practice self-control without feeling deprived or miserable
- How to find and maintain joy even when circumstances aren't joyful
- The differences between true joy and fleeting happiness
- How to teach your children to be kind and gentle
- How to grow your faith, stop worrying and trust God
- What it means to be truly “good” in a world that's often not
- How to maintain hope and positivity when surrounded by negativity

Christ is our ultimate example for all Fruits of the Spirit. With these devotionals, you'll learn more about who He is and become more like Him. This will enhance your personal walk and confidence in your faith. You'll also feel more prepared to handle the tough situations life presents each day.

All Bible verses are from the New International Version (NIV).



Day 1: God is Hope

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace
as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Romans 15:13

Hope is part of God's character, and He models hope for the purpose of giving us hope.

It's a familiar word for Christians, but most of us don't know exactly what it means. Sometimes we equate hope with wishful thinking, as in "I hope I get the job I applied for" or "I hope I get married someday." In this verse, Paul wants to remind us that hope is more than wishing for what we want. We're meant to overflow with hope, as the Holy Spirit gives it to us.

What does to overflow with hope mean? Not all circumstances are hopeful, and not all situations end in a hopeful manner. There's a clue in the first part of this verse. Paul tells the Romans that He prays that the God of hope also fills them with peace and joy. These are Fruits of the Spirit available to every Christian. If you don't feel peace or joy in your current situation, ask God for an extra measure. Peace and joy will often naturally lead to hope.

Remember that hope isn't happiness. Cancer treatments, painful divorces and other such situations are never happy. However, you can find hope in the midst of them.

Hope comes from knowing who your God is and what He can do. God promises to bring good out of all situations for those who love Him. Additionally, He promises comfort to broken or hurting people many times in the Bible. Ask God to remind you who He is and what He can do in your situation. You may not receive the answers you thought you wanted, but often God shows us a better solution – one we weren't expecting. Place your hope in the person of God and the path He will show you.



Day 2: Cultivate Hope

But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in You.
- Psalm 39:7

As Christians, we know the Holy Spirit can make us overflow with hope. We're meant to share that hope with others. However, knowing exactly how to do that can be difficult.

Most of us regularly encounter people who seem to have no hope. Some of them may not be Christians, so they don't know the God we worship or the joy He longs to give them. Yet some of these people may be Christians. They're simply bogged down in difficult circumstances or struggling with inner conflicts, such as depression or mental illness.

When you encounter someone who needs hope, you can and should ask God to show you specifically what that person needs to hear or see from you. For example, a single mom with two kids may get hope from someone offering to babysit so she can spend time with friends. However, prayer is only the first step in sharing hope. Here are a few other ways to spread hope:

- **Write an encouraging note or letter.** Highlight specific traits you love in a person, such as generosity, humor or a talent in a specific area.
- **Go to the person and ask what they need to talk about.** No matter how difficult the topic, listen and show empathy.
- **Ask if you can fill a physical need.** This could include cooking a meal, fixing something in their house or walking a pet.
- **Invite the person out.** Some of the people who most need hope are fully or partially housebound because of age or disabilities. They may feel unnoticed. Ask what their favorite activity or place to go is, and participate with them.
- **Laugh.** Proverbs says a cheerful heart is good medicine. Maybe the person you're thinking of needs to focus on lighthearted things for a while. Bring him or her some light reading or a DVD of a Christian comedian. Share funny memories or go to a funny movie together.



Day 3: God is Love

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.
- 1 John 4:8

God is love is a familiar axiom among Christians. It's one of the first lessons we learn in Sunday school classes meant for the smallest children. But what does this mean, and how can we imitate God's love? Today's verse tells us that if you don't love, you don't truly know God. Does this mean if you don't feel loving toward everyone all the time, you aren't really a Christian?

Actually, this verse means something much different. It reminds us that love is part of God's character.

We usually talk about love as something we have or feel toward a person, place or thing. Yet God in His perfection takes love to a whole new level. He embodies love in the deepest way possible, toward everyone at all times. He can love a devout nun or missionary with great passion, but He extends that same depth and passion to the mass murderer who doesn't know Him or care who He is.

How can this be? Our finite minds will probably never comprehend this. However, that's why John encourages us to love and tells us that those who don't love don't know God. He isn't saying you have to feel warm and fuzzy toward everyone all the time or love with deep passion you can't always feel. If you could do that, you would be God.

This verse simply tells us to imitate the love God has for us – to love as unconditionally as possible and show love in as many ways as we can. That looks different for every person and situation, but if you reach out to God and ask to be filled with His love, He will teach you how.



Day 4: Cultivate Love

As water reflects the face, so one's life reflects the heart.
- Proverbs 27:19

If you've ever looked into a calm body of water, you've probably seen your face there. Water can give us physical reflections, but as today's verse says, we need to look deeper to see the reflections of our hearts. If you spend your life looking at and meditating on negative things, it's likely your heart is bitter. If you spend your life looking for opportunities to love, give and share, you're cultivating love.

God loves a loving and generous heart, as many familiar Bible stories and verses prove. However, a generous heart must be cultivated early. If you want to develop generous hearts in your kids, here are a few ideas your whole family can use:

- **Donate often.** For kids, this usually means donating old toys and books. After Christmas is a great time to do so. Make sure everything is in good condition. Adults, set an example and donate your own possessions.
- **Choose a family charity project.** You might sponsor a child through Food for the Hungry or collect items for Christmas Child shoeboxes throughout the year.
- **Practice small instances of generosity.** Encourage siblings to split that last cookie or take turns choosing the DVD on movie night. Offer to help your spouse with household tasks or make their favorite meal.
- **Teach young children the importance of taking turns.** Part of being generous is knowing you can't always be first and that you must wait patiently for your chance at an activity.
- **Visit people who need it.** One of the best ways to be generous is giving someone your time. This could mean visiting a grandparent in a nursing home or a neighbor whose family lives far away.
- **Encourage pet care, especially playing and stroking.** Generosity extends to those who can't speak for themselves or tell us what they want, and for young children, pets can be a good example.



Day 5: God is Joy

For the Lord takes delight in His people;
He crowns the humble with victory.
- Psalm 149:4

Did you know you that not only is joy part of God's character, but you bring Him joy?

Many people, even Christians, doubt this or claim it isn't true. Unfortunately, even in the church, myth persists that God is a cosmic cop. Many Christians think He barely tolerates them, allowing them into Heaven because of Jesus' sacrifice but waiting to punish their mistakes and failures on Earth.

God's true heart toward you is one of deep love and pride.

It's true that God can't tolerate sin and expects us to repent and turn away from it. However, a plethora of Bible verses, including today's, show us a different picture of God than we might be used to. God delights in you. You make Him smile. He created you, and He looks on you with joy and pride. When you do sin or fail, He doesn't take pleasure in your pain. He says, "Come back to Me. We'll handle this together." A pastor once said that if God had a refrigerator, all our pictures would be on it.

Knowing you're God's beloved child and that you bring Him joy will bring more joy to your life, too. Your circumstances may not be the best, but knowing God is rooting for you in the midst of them can make them easier to handle adversity.

Additionally, you'll be eager to share God's joy with others. You may find yourself doing more kind and generous deeds throughout the year or praising God more. If you need a reminder of how God thinks of you, pray to be shown His joy. Then revel in it, because that will bring Him the most joy of all.



Day 6: Cultivate Joy

You are worthy, our Lord and God to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being.

- Revelation 4:11

Today's verse overflows with joy. You can almost hear the angels and the saints praising God in Heaven, reminding Him how worthy He is of our honor and love. Reading verses like this often fills us with joy and inspires us to look for God's presence around us. God rejoices when we take such delight in His word.

However, sometimes finding joy is difficult or impossible, no matter what verses we read. Since our world is filled with sin, it often feels like a dim and hopeless place. Christians aren't immune to a lack of joy, particularly if circumstances don't lend themselves to it.

At one time or another, we'll all find ourselves in serious situations that seem to lack God's joy. This could be an unsaved loved one whose behavior is destructive, a devastating diagnosis, a miscarriage, a disability or any number of other circumstances. However, God wants us to cling to Him in these times and find His joy. Here are a few ways to experience this:

- **Worship.** Most people equate worship with singing, which you can do. Yet you can use any other talent, such as writing, cooking or painting, to worship God. Hebrews talks about bringing a sacrifice of praise to Him. Do so, and meditate on joyful verses as you do.
- **Reach out.** Find a trusted friend or clergy member to share your burdens and offer to share those of others. Help someone in a physical way – write a letter or give a hug.
- **Get some fresh air.** Sometimes joy can be hard to find if you're cooped up inside. Take a walk or a drive and notice the beauty of God's creation.
- **Spend time with family and friends, doing lighthearted activities.** Isolation brings loneliness, but socializing can increase joy.



Day 7: God is Peace

For He Himself is our peace.
- Ephesians 2:14a

Peace is a well-known fruit of the Spirit and part of God's character.

Many Christians struggle to find God's peace in everyday life. When most people think of peace, they think of a warm, calm feeling in the chest or a feeling that trouble can't touch them. They equate lack of feelings with a lack of peace.

In today's verse, Paul reminds us our peace is a Person, not a feeling. Christ himself is our peace. In other words, no matter how chaotic life seems, focusing on Christ will help us find peace again. We may not feel it, but it will be there.

How can you make Christ your peace? Start by studying verses like today's or the stories of biblical characters such as Mary, who trusted the Lord despite questions about their circumstances. You can also assess how chaotic your life truly is. Although you can't control all circumstances, you can and should control what you can.

For example, if you spend your entire day on the phone or computer or with the television blaring, unplugging for a while can help to quiet your life. If you're overloaded with commitments, take a step back. Pray, asking God to show you what He wants you to do and what activities you should let go.

If circumstances are beyond your control, find small ways to inject peace into your daily life. Read the Bible or a Christian novel during chemo treatments. Listen to soothing music or meditations on the way to court proceedings. If family life has you stressed, ask a spouse or friend to take over chores or kid-related duties so you can have time to decompress. Finally, remember to pray often, seeking the source of your peace and sharing needs and praise.



Day 8: Cultivate Peace

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you.
I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.
- John 14:27

Jesus made sure to speak to his disciples about peace, so He clearly wanted us to experience it, too. In fact, references to peace are all over the New Testament. It's even included as one of the first three Fruits of the Spirit. However, Jesus knew peace would be hard to find. He tells us not to have troubled hearts or be afraid, which acknowledges these conditions exist.

These days, not letting your heart be troubled might seem impossible. Watching the news for 30 minutes is enough to depress the most optimistic soul. However, it's possible to find and hang onto peace despite all that. If you're having trouble staying peaceful right now, there are a few things you can do to help yourself:

- **Meditate on what is good.** Philippians 4:8 specifically tells us to think of what is true, noble, right and pure. This doesn't mean ignoring what's going on in the world, but it does mean reminding ourselves who God is and that He is in control. Memorize scripture or fill your mind with uplifting messages from Christian books and music.
- **Get quiet.** Turn off the TV and computer, and follow Jesus' example of going into a private room and closing the door to pray or read your Bible.
- **Use your talents and passions to worship God and serve others.** Focusing on what you're good at and how it helps God's kingdom can bring you peace, as can serving others and making a difference, no matter how small.

Day 9: God is Truth

Jesus answered, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through Me.
If you really know Me, you will know My Father as well.
From now on you do know Him and have seen Him.'
- John 14:6-7

We live in a relativist world. Everyone has his or her own religion or philosophy, and everyone claims that his or hers is the one that holds truth. At the same time, our world's pervasive attitude is, "If it's true for you, fine; but it's not true for me."

How can we be sure our God, Jesus Christ, really is truth in the face of such an open, uncommitted attitude toward faith?

Jesus knew we would face this challenge, so He is explicit in how He addresses it. In today's verse, He states without ambiguity that He is our way, truth and life.

Truth is part of God's character.

Everything He tells us is true, and He is the only way to gain both eternal life and a fulfilled life on earth. He doesn't leave room for addition or subtraction or say, "I am true as long as you believe it." No – He is the full embodiment of truth.

Other religions or philosophies may have versions of the truths the Bible gives us. For example, most other religious founders or leaders tell us to love our neighbor, forgive enemies, respect creation and do charitable deeds. However, Jesus makes it clear that only His truth is complete. Through Him, we can know and see God, and as we get to know Him, we will understand more of His words.

Truth is difficult to pin down at times, especially with so many voices claiming to have it. If you're unsure God is truth or if you're a Christian but struggling with a particular truth in the Bible, turn to the source of truth. Ask Him to open your eyes, and use your new knowledge to spread God's truth and share the life He wants to give.

Day 10: Cultivate Truthfulness

When this is done, I will go to the king,
even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.
- Esther 4:16b

God wants us to speak the truth, but sometimes speaking it requires much more courage than we anticipated.

Esther knew this firsthand. As queen of Persia, she had to hide her Jewish heritage, especially after King Xerxes' evil prime minister, Haman, decreed that the Jews of Persia should be annihilated.

Esther had one chance to save her people, but it meant revealing her greatest secret. Moreover, if she went to King Xerxes without an invitation, he could kill her on the spot.

Hopefully, few of us will be asked to give up our lives for the sake of truth, but we may be asked to face frightening circumstances. In many cases, Christians who told the truth about their God or stuck by the truth of their morals have lost jobs, families, possessions or prestige. In several foreign countries around the world, Christians are being beheaded, burned or tortured for their faith. Standing up for truth might cost you a deep and important friendship or a financial opportunity you or your family needs. The truth may be the most difficult words you speak in those situations.

If you've been called to speak the truth today, don't hesitate. Ask God to reassure you of His plan and fill your heart with courage. Then speak the words He gives you, whether they're meant for a family member or a large group of strangers. It may be difficult and result in negative consequences, but like Esther, you'll be rewarded. Your message will be heard, and perhaps you will plant seeds in people who need to listen and respond.

Day 11: God is Patient

...To those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it, only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water.
- 1 Peter 3:20

Most people, even Christians, don't think of God as particularly patient. They think of Him as loving but ready to dispense wrath at a moment's notice. Most Christians might even say they wouldn't blame God for impatience, considering the state of today's world. Sin runs rampant, and surely a holy God can only tolerate so much.

Today's verse indicates that patience is part of God character. He is infinitely more patient than people think or could hope to be themselves.

Peter describes God waiting patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built for more people to repent and be saved from coming destruction. Elsewhere, Peter specifically describes God as patient and says He doesn't want anyone to perish.

God grieves when people don't listen to His warnings and grieves more when they perish because they failed to listen. Sometimes physical perishing doesn't come right away – in fact, this is rare. God knows eternal punishment is so awful, so devastating, that He will wait as long as He likes for as many people as possible to come to Him. He will be incredibly patient with those who doubt, question or outright reject Him. God gives you and me chance after chance to see His truth. Only as a last resort does God condemn anyone.

Endeavoring to show His patience is the best way for us to show people who God truly is. Don't give up on people who need God, even if they're willful and destructive toward themselves and others. Continue to show patience and love, and let God draw people toward Himself.

Day 12: Cultivate Patience

A hot-tempered person must pay the penalty;
rescue them and you will have to do it again.
- Proverbs 19:19

Someone once said to be careful about praying for patience, because you'll get what you ask for – in the form of situations that test the patience you already have.

In all seriousness, patience is often one of the most difficult Fruits of the Spirit to cultivate. We want what we want the moment we ask for it, and we aren't about to tolerate people who try our patience. This is especially true for young children. Children naturally expect the world to revolve around them, so they must learn patience and the lessons must be repeated often.

How you teach patience will depend heavily on your child. Some children's temperaments allow them to be more patient than others. If your child is already competing with siblings or other family members for attention, he or she might show more patience than is typical for someone his or her age. However, a few key tips can help you teach this virtue to any child in almost any situation:

- **Set an example.** If you're always yelling in traffic or tapping your foot in line, your child will learn that waiting is a bad thing. Take a deep breath and focus on other things.
- **Watch your own temper.** We all have relatives, coworkers or friends who drive us crazy, but your child shouldn't learn that the solution is to badmouth them. If you must vent, do so away from the kids. Teach your child to walk away from someone who makes them angry or say something like, "Please don't call me names."
- **Take children to places they naturally have to wait, and teach them to cope.** Use things like books, coloring or games; or talk to them about their days.
- **Use "when-then" phrases.** For example, on a long car ride, say, "We'll be at Grandma's after six songs."

Day 13: God is Kind

Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God:
Sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you
continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.
- Romans 11:22

Christians sometimes struggle with how to interpret this verse. If God is kind, why would He cut off any of his people?

Actually, in this verse, Paul is speaking to Israel. Specifically, Paul's words are directed at Gentile Christians who believe that Jewish "branches" of their spiritual family tree were cut off so they could be grafted in – that God no longer accepts Jewish Christians.

In truth, God accepts every person who turns to Him and inclines to the truth. Your background, past sins, family life and other external factors don't matter to God. Additionally, the Bible promises He will love you with everlasting love and kindness. He does expect you to continue in His kindness – that is, abide in and obey Him. However, God's motive is to be kind, not to cut people off from Him at will.

Should Christians worry about losing their salvation or being cut off from God? This verse would seem to indicate so, but again that would be a misinterpretation. Here, Paul seems to apply cutting off to those who do not abide in God – those who claim to know Him but probably did not to begin with.

The Bible tells us true Christians will show their fruit, and that you don't have to work to produce fruit. If the Spirit is inside you, you and others will be able to tell. If you don't feel the Spirit working, ask God to show you. In His kindness, He will help you see and become a stronger, more confident Christian over time.

Day 14: Cultivate Kindness

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.
- Matthew 7:12a

As parents, we all want our children to be kind. It sometimes seems kindness would be an easy virtue to teach, but children learn through repetition. They also tend to be self-centered, not because they're mean, but because their worlds are still so small. Instilling kindness in your kids will take patience, repetition and plenty of relatable lessons.

Today's verse is a good place to start. It's easy for children to understand and memorize, and it relates back to their worlds.

For example, you could say to your child, "Would you want someone at school to take your toys without asking? You need to ask first." Pairing the instruction with this type of question will teach your children empathy and get them to think critically at an age-appropriate level.

If you need more tips and object lessons, you might consider doing a few of these with your kids:

- **Role play.** Take the question above to the next level with role-playing. Use a situation your child or his teacher might have told you about.
- **Discourage using unkind words.** Make it a house rule that name-calling, swearing and other unkind words will have a consequence.
- **Catch your child being kind, and praise her.** Say something like, "I'm proud of you for sharing with Beth today. Did that feel good?"
- **Read about kindness.** Use stories, including Bible stories, in which kind and patient characters are rewarded.
- **Do kind acts as a family.** Volunteer at a soup kitchen or animal shelter, or donate toys and books to charity.
- **Be kind.** Perform small kind acts for your spouse, relatives and children, such as helping with chores, caring for a pet, or doing a favorite activity as part of family time.

Day 15: God is Gentle

After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire.
And after the fire came a gentle whisper.
- 1 Kings 19:12

Gentleness is part of God's character.

When reading the Bible, we often run across stories of God's incredible miracles, especially in the Old Testament. Stories such as Moses' encounter with the burning bush, Elijah calling down fire from Heaven and the parting of the Red Sea are crucial to the Bible. Yet they can also give us an incorrect view of God's character and His miracles if studied on their own without context.

Many people, especially new Christians, expect God's presence to be big and obvious at all times. They can see God in widely reported miracles, such as the healing of terminal cancer or the birth of healthy triplets to a woman who was told she'd never conceive. However, focusing on these can make it harder to hear how God usually speaks – in a gentle whisper.

Just like an earthly parent, God doesn't like to shout to get our attention. Tuning in to His whispers shows Him we can hear Him and will listen to what He says.

Gentle whispers won't be obvious at first, particularly if you're a new Christian. With practice though, you'll hear them. They often come in the form of a Bible verse you've read before, but that has a greater impact than usual. Sometimes they come as a nudge to do or pray about something specific. Sometimes, God uses other people to tell us something we need to hear. At other times, a change in circumstance might let you know God is quietly speaking. For example, a job opportunity in your city that comes just before you move might be God's way of telling you to stay.

Miracles are an important part of God's work, and we should never stop looking for them. However, His gentle whispers are what will guide us the most in our journeys.

Day 16: Cultivate Gentleness

...To slander no one, be peaceable and considerate,
and always be gentle toward everyone.

- Titus 3:2b

Kindness and gentleness are listed as Fruits of the Spirit in Galatians. Are they the same thing? What does it mean to have a gentle spirit? This verse lets us know gentleness is a fruit all its own, and that a gentle spirit can and must be cultivated.

Some Christians believe having a gentle spirit means being overly meek and never standing up for yourself. Although meekness is sometimes a synonym for gentleness, having a gentle spirit doesn't mean accepting abuse or never letting yourself be heard. Titus indicates that gentleness of spirit is being considerate toward everyone, putting others first and avoiding slander or gossip.

This is often more difficult to do than it seems.

Putting others first goes against everything the world tells us to do, and gossip or slander can be as natural as breathing – especially if the other person has wronged you. As with many other Fruits of the Spirit, developing gentleness requires transcending human nature, which is impossible without God. If you want to cultivate gentleness, study verses like today's. Ask for direction from God, as well as trusted people like a clergy member. Show gentleness to family and friends, and work your way up to strangers or even those you don't necessarily like. God will reward your faithfulness.

What if people are already taking advantage of your gentleness and abusing you? Remember that tolerating abuse isn't the same as being a gentle person. If the situation is severe, get out as quickly as possible. Seek help from the appropriate agency, such as your local social services. You can also seek help from family, friends and clergy. You may need counseling to learn how to deal with your abuser and approach him or her with gentleness. Take your time, and seek God's guidance in handling this situation.

Day 17: God is Self-Controlled

Like a city whose walls are broken through
is a person who lacks self-control.
- Proverbs 25:28 NIV

Self-control is part of God's character and a Fruit of the Spirit we often teach our children because we don't want them to be spoiled. However, as adults, we often rationalize our own lack of this fruit. "I'm an adult," we say. "I should be able to do, say and have what I want without worrying about displeasing God."

This line of thinking is wrong and dangerous.

God expects adults to please Him just like children – perhaps more so, since adults are more mature and understand His commands better than children would. Additionally, going through life without any self-control often leads to destruction, which breaks God's heart and damages your relationship with Him.

Will God's heart be broken if you have a glass of wine or an extra dessert or if you treat yourself to a shopping spree? No. The key to self-control is knowing what comes first in the word – self.

Self-control is about considering factors other than your wants and needs. It's about knowing your own limits and staying healthy physically, emotionally and spiritually. One glass of wine might be okay, but you need to be able to stop there rather than drinking an entire bottle. Desserts are delicious but can lead to obesity if they become a staple in your diet. Shopping for pleasure is fun, but confusing what you want with what you actually need often leads to debt.

How can you practice self-control without letting denial cross into legalism?

First, know your weak areas and deal with those. If you're a shopper, set and stick to a budget with help from a spouse or another accountability partner when necessary. If you tend to stay up late watching TV, gradually limit screen time until you don't need it. Accountability will keep you on track. Memorize verses like today's, and ask God to increase your desire for self-control.

Day 18: Cultivate Self-Control

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.
- Matthew 7:12a

We hear a lot about self-discipline these days. Self-discipline refers to self-control.

Writers of diet books and fitness plans tout self-discipline as a way to lose weight and attain the perfect body. Parents are encouraged to teach kids self-discipline so they can succeed in school, athletics and other activities. As the economy recovers, people advise each other to use self-discipline to curb spending habits.

But trying to master self-discipline on our own leads to disaster.

Hyper-focusing on self-discipline can cause legalism, or a tendency to exaggerate our own righteous deeds and not show mercy toward those who are struggling. It can also cause an emotional backlash, since constantly denying ourselves the things God approves of makes us miserable, bitter and prone to taking out our feelings on others. We must rely on God to give us true, balanced self-discipline.

Most Christians are familiar with the concept of relying on God but struggle with how to do it. Does relying on God mean sitting back and waiting for Him to fix all our self-control problems? No. Actually, relying on God means being honest. Tell Him where you are struggling and how self-discipline makes you feel. Ask Him for a greater desire for discipline and to see discipline God's way, not as a punishment but as a way to grow.

Start new disciplines slowly, and give yourself grace if you mess up. God wants you to succeed in building all the Fruits of the Spirit, including self-discipline. If you rely on Him, success will be yours. Your body and mind may never be perfect, but you'll be in a better place than you were when you began.

Today concludes our study on the Fruits of the Spirit. We at Food for the Hungry hope you've benefitted from seeing how God displays each of the fruits of Galatians 5:22-23 – and how you can cultivate those same characteristics into your own life, along with the lives of friends, family and other people around you.



Food for the Hungry is dedicated to serving the world's most vulnerable people in some of the world's hardest places, rebuilding relationships and transforming communities. We operate in more than 20 countries, where we provide clean water, education, health care, livelihoods and more to those in need. Our staff members live out the Fruits of the Spirit every day, and we've provided this devotional so you can benefit from knowing about God's character and how you can emulate Him in your life.



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