

LOVE



THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE,
PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GENEROSITY, FAITHFULNESS,
GENTLENESS, AND SELF-CONTROL . . .

IF WE LIVE BY THE SPIRIT,
LET US ALSO BE GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT
GALATIANS 5: 22-25

The defining feature of God's love
is its other-directedness
Philip Kenneson



We come to good by love:
Our words must be made flesh.
Wendell Berry

LIFE ON THE VINE



LOVE

“Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

Colossians 3:14

The Theme

Love should be the primary disposition of the Christian life. The eight other dispositions, or fruits of the Spirit, on Paul’s list are best understood as amplifying what is entailed by that way of love.

The Word

- ◆ **DAY 1: Read Luke 10:25-37 (*the good Samaritan*)**
How would you list the characteristics of love based on the parable?
- ◆ **DAY 2: Read Galatians 5:13-25 (*marks of believer’s life*) and Colossians 3:12-14 (*putting on Christ*)**
Think about the metaphors Paul uses to describe the character of the believer’s life. Consider what Paul means by encouraging believers to “clothe” themselves with love.
- ◆ **DAY 3: Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 (*The Lord’s Supper*)**
Why did the practice of commemorating the Last Supper become known as an “agape” meal or love feast?
- ◆ **DAY 4: Read 1 John 4:19-21 (*God first loved us*)**
Reflect on the idea that it is the nature of God’s love of us that is to define our love of God as well as our love of others.
- ◆ **DAY 5: Read Chapter 2 in *Life On the Vine*** Kenneson suggests that the character of God’s love is the basis for understanding the character of the Christian’s love. Consider the implications of that. Also pay attention to the connection he makes between the observance of the Lord’s Supper and the embodiment of love. After reading the chapter, work through the study guide on the following pages.

The Book

That love heads Paul's list of the spirit's fruit is hardly accidental. Indeed, many Christian thinkers across the ages have insisted that the fruit of the Spirit listed by Paul are not nine separate fruits, of which love is simply the first. Rather, love—as embodied in Jesus Christ and poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5)—most fully reflects the very character of God. Love ought, therefore, to be the primary disposition of the Christian life. The eight other virtues or dispositions that follow in Paul's list might best be understood as amplifying and further specifying what is entailed by this way of love. In short, these other eight dispositions, taken together, characterize a life lived in, by, and through God's love. In this sense, love is much like light, which, when passing through a prism, breaks into its component colors. Just as these colors neither exist apart from the light nor are something added to the light, so these eight fruit neither exist apart from nor are something added on to love. We might also note that just as each color blends seamlessly into those adjacent to it, so it is difficult (and perhaps even unwise) to draw excessively precise boundaries around these dispositions; they quite naturally seem to blend into each other.

(Kenneson, pp. 29-37)

The STUDY GUIDE

Exploring the Roots of LOVE

Paul uses two images to talk about the marks or character of the believer's life—bearing fruit and wearing clothes. Recall Galatians 5:22-25 and Colossians 3:12-14. Then consider these questions:

- ◆ What does Paul convey about living as a Christian by using metaphors rather than propositions?
- ◆ What characteristics of wearing clothes do you think Paul had in mind in describing the Christian life? What characteristics of bearing fruit do you think Paul had in mind in describing the Christian life?

Earlier, in Galatians 5:13, Paul uses another image to describe how the believer is to love: “through love become slaves to one another.”

- ◆ Which metaphor—fruit bearing, clothing, or slavery—most inspires and informs your living as a Christian? Why?
- ◆ Which metaphor most challenges or critiques your living as a Christian? Why?

Examining the Fruit of LOVE

Character of the Fruit

In chapter 2 of the book, Kenneson says that “*the fruit of the Spirit listed by Paul are not nine separate fruit, of which love is simply the first. Rather, love—as embodied in Jesus Christ and poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5)—most fully reflects the very character of God.*”

Examine the pattern of God's love as the model for our love in Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37).

- ◆ In what way does Jesus' parable validate the lawyer's statement in 10:27?
- ◆ When are we guilty of knowing the demands of living a Christian life but looking for a loophole or some way around them?
- ◆ Characterize God's love based on this parable. Which of the characteristics of God's love are the most difficult to reflect in our lives?

Recall this statement from Chapter 2: “*The defining feature of God's love is its 'other-directedness.'*” Reread 1 John 4:19-21 with this question in mind: How do we experience God's *other-directed love* as both a gift to be received and a fruit to be cultivated?

Obstacles to Bearing the Fruit

In addition to identifying the character of the fruit of love, cultivation of the fruit requires uprooting those practices which impede growth. Kenneson argues that our economic practices are chief among the impediments to bearing the fruit of love.

- ◆ *Promoting self-interest*: viewing others as customers or competitor
- ◆ *Price-tagging everything*: viewing people and their talents as commodities rather than as gifts.
- ◆ *Consumer choice*: believing we are Christian by virtue of the “Christian” products and services we “consume.”

Which of the three impediments present the greatest challenge to you?

Bearing the Fruit of LOVE in the World

Cultivating the Fruit

To cultivate the fruit of love means to cultivate a way of life that resists the commodification of our relationship with God, with others, and with all of creation. Kenneson suggests three cultivation practices:

- WORSHIP (Deut 6:4-6)—paying attention to others by paying attention to God through praise and thanksgiving.
 - EMBODIMENT (1 Cor 11:17-34)—acting out, in our relationships with others, the sacrificial gift of Christ’s own body, symbolized in the Lord’s Supper.
 - STEWARDSHIP (Mk 10:17-22)—maintaining a balance between “self” and “stuff.”
- ◆ How do these cultivation practices enable our love to more nearly reflect God’s love? What other cultivation practices do you think could result in bearing the fruit of love?
 - ◆ What portion of time do you devote week after week to yourself and your agenda as compared to the needs of others?
 - ◆ What habits or practices do you engage in presently that cause you to view others as objects or commodities for your benefit?

Turn back to page 2 of this participant guide. Meditate on van Gogh’s painting, *The Good Samaritan*, and read the quote from Wendell Berry below it. Look for an opportunity in the coming weeks to “flesh out” the love depicted by the artist and the parable.