

INSIDE OUT
Small Group Notes
The Fruit of the Spirit #1 "LOVE"
The Rev. Dr. Jeremy Mahood
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WELCOME to the winter series **INSIDE OUT: The Fruit of the Spirit**. Over the next weeks we will take an in-depth look at what it means to reproduce the character and nature of Christ in us so that we no longer *react* to the events in our life and in our world from our own earthly character but choose to *respond* the way Christ would have responded. Moving from an earthly reaction to a Christ like response is at the heart of spiritual growth and maturity. If there is any chance of reaching our world, our friends, neighbours and relatives with the hope that is available in Jesus Christ they will need to see something in us that reflects the character of Christ. This series is designed so that you can understand the character of Christ biblically, and come to understand how HIS SPIRIT reproduces that character in our everyday lives and experiences.

1. **READ:** Galatians 5: 22-23

- a. Read if from a few different translations. I especially like the ESV (English Standard version) which versions do you like and why?
- b. Of the nine dimensions of the Fruit of the Spirit which one do you feel is most developed in you and which one is underdeveloped?
- c. What do you think is the significance of the word SPIRIT having a capital "S"?

2. **DISCUSS THIS QUOTE:**

"The expression of Christian character is not good doing, but God-likeness. If the Spirit of God has transformed you within, you will exhibit Divine characteristics in your life, not good human characteristics. God's life in us expresses itself as God's life, not a human life trying to be godly.

---Oswald Chambers

- a. What do you think he means by stating the difference between a human life *trying to be godly* as opposed to *God's life* expressing itself though us?

3. **THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE**

- a. The word "love" is one of the most misused and over used words in our language. Discuss the ways the word 'love' has been misused.

4. **READ:** 1 John 4:16

- a. What does this verse say about the character of God?
- b. What is the requirement here to "live in God"?

5. **READ:** John 3:16 and 1 John 3:16

- a. What is God actively doing to express his love towards us?
- b. In what way does God's active love (giving) have nothing to do with emotion?
- c. How do you see yourself confusing the emotion of love with the commandment to love?

6. **READ:** John 13:34-35
 - a. What are we told we must do?
 - b. What is the role of our emotions here? How is 'loving', an obedient command and not emotional response?

7. **READ and DISCUSS** the following quote:

"When we try and say we are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ and yet we do not devote our lives to the eternal good of other people, there is a deep contradiction within that gnaws away at our souls and dissolves our confidence and leaves us feeling weak and inauthentic" ---John Piper

8. **READ:** 1 John 4:12
 - a. How does John say that others will see the invisible God in our world?
 - b. According to this verse what happens when we begin to love each other?
 - c. So what happens if we fail to love?

9. **READ** the following and discuss the various elements of this quote.

"Love is action, (not just words or even a feeling) directed to another person that is motivated by our relationship to Jesus Christ and is given freely without a personal reward in mind"

---Robert Strand

10. **COMMENT:** Giving love freely without expectation of a reward is difficult. Loving people who are, unlovable is next to impossible if we try and do it from our own basic character. However the wonderful teaching of scripture is that it is possible for us to love, not with our own human love, but with the divine love of God in us. It is God's love in us that loves. There are active steps we can take to cultivate the love of Christ in us so that we may be agents of love on our world.

STAGES TO TRANSFORM YOUR EARHTY CAHRACTER INTO THE DIVINE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

STAGE 1

THINK LOVING THOUGHTS

- a. How many times a day do you think, you think thoughts that are unkind, judgemental or critical? Can you guess at a number?
- b. Share an example of an unloving thought you had, with your group?
- c. Now using the same example, reframe that unloving thought to become a loving thought. You can help each other out here if you are having a challenge with this. What do you think Jesus would think if he was in your circumstance?

The process goes like this:

- a. You have an **unloving thought** (critical, condemning, anger, unkind, judgemental etc)
- b. **Stop:** bring the thought into captivity (Read 2 Corinthians 10:5) do not continue to dwell on the thought
- c. **Shift:** your mind into neutral
- d. **Think** a loving thought to replace the unloving thought. How would Jesus love in this situation?

THINK OF ANOTHER SITUATION WHERE YOU HAD AN UNLOVING THOUGHT AND SHARE IT WITH THE GROUP....NOW USING THE PROCESS ABOVE, PRACTICE REFRAMING THAT THOUGHT INTO A LOVING THOUGHT

STAGE 2

SAY LOVING WORDS

- a. How many times in a day do you say words out loud that are unloving, critical, judgemental, hurtful, angry etc.?
- b. Share with the group in what type of situations does this occur? Is it with your kids, your spouse, your co workers, around the water cooler, while driving etc?
- c. Now *using the process above* reframe your words to be more loving. Perhaps someone in the group could help with this. Eg. How would you reframe (restate)...‘get out of my way’ or ‘you really annoy me’ or ‘is he ever stupid’, ‘now that’s ignorant’, ‘what a dummy’, I hate the ‘way she looks’, ‘he should take better care of himself’, ‘now that embarrasses me’ or any other phrases that do not reflect the love of Jesus?

STAGE 3

DO LOVING DEEDS

This is the essence of real love...to act, to give, to do. One of the most transformative behaviours we can engage in is to do something loving for someone, especially if that person is difficult or annoying. The practical act of participating in an act of kindness releases the love of Jesus and transforms our minds. This loving deed does not have to be large, expensive or time consuming...it is a step of obedience. The more we DO the easier it becomes and the more our selfish, fearful and insecure human nature becomes transformed into the character of Christ.

- a. Share with your group an example of how you are going to do something practical, a tangible act of love towards someone this week. Do not be afraid to start small. Remember the word of God says that our love will be *made complete AS* we love...not before and not immediately. This is a process of character development. Get your feet wet! Trust God and his word and trust the Spirit of Christ who lives in you.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT: could you imagine what would happen to our relationships if we began this process? What would happen if we stopped criticising our spouse or our children or our co workers? Our frustrations would be replaced with peace, our anger would diminish and our anxieties would begin to subside. The power of Christ in us is there for us to use, we just have to discipline ourselves to take a hold of it on thought, one word one deed at a time.....just imagine the transformation in our homes, our churches, our workplaces. And even if nothing else ever changes, you will be forever changed.

FOR EXTRA READING: 1 Corinthians 13. Try this in The Message translation. This entire chapter is about Christ. Try substituting the word Christ for the word Love though out. Every characteristic mentioned in this chapter is available to you and me through the fruit of the Spirit the Spirit of Christ.

PRAYER REQUEST:

We have been given an opportunity to help the community of Attawapiskat through providing a Community Feast. A Community feast is an important celebration in the native culture. The high school has been closed again for weeks and the young people are finding winter long and arduous due to no school. Community moral is sinking and the Chief is concerned for the lives of the children and thoughts of suicide are rising again.

WE WOULD LIKE TO RAISE \$6,000 TO FEED THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY and PAY FOR THEIR FEAST

- DeBeers(diamond mining company) has offered to fly the food into the community.
- The Chief has a cook ready to go
- Rev. Bill Prankard will oversee the operation to ensure all goes well. (he has worked in native communities for over 25 years)
- We have been asked to provide the funds for the food.
- The feast will take place February 28-March 2

PLEASE PRAYERFULLY CONSIDER WHAT YOU OR YOUR GROUP COULD DO SO THAT WE CAN BRING HOPE AND HEALING TO THIS NORTHERN COMMUNITY. Please pray that God would use this open door into this community...we have been waiting for years for an invitation and now we have it!

LET'S DO A LOVING DEED TOGETHER

THE DONATIONS YOU MAKE SHOULD BE CLEARLY MADE WITH AN "A" AND SHOULD BE AN EXTRA SPECIAL GIFT ABOVE ANY REGULAR GIVING.

Should you need more information just contact me, *Jeremy*