

## Lesson 11 | May 12, 2024

# The Spirit Produces Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control

**Study Text:** Psalm 25:8–11; Matthew 5:5; 11:28–30; 21:18–22; Galatians 5:22–23; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27; Hebrews 11:1–2,6; 2 Peter 1:3–8

**Central Truth:** The Holy Spirit produces faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in the believer.

### Key Verse: 2 Peter 1:3

According as his [God's] divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue (KJV).

By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence (NLT).

### Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the two different uses of the word faith in the Bible.
- Students will affirm that being meek is not being weak.
- Students will choose the discipline of commitment to avoid the discipline of correction.

## Introducing the Study

**Say:** Confidence in God's love for us causes us to bear the fruit of love, joy, and peace. We become the conduit of God's love to others, showing patience, kindness, and goodness. And as the Spirit leads us to give and receive love in greater measure, we demonstrate faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

### Opening Activity—Words of Faith

**Ask:** *How many English words can you list that are related to the words faith or belief?* List them on the board as the class calls them out, and then count the number of words.

**Say:** Remember, the fruit the Spirit produces in us causes our attitudes to match our Master's attitudes. These characteristics are all grounded in love. When we live out God's love with undivided integrity, we are faithful, gentle, and self-controlled. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the Old Testament, the concept of *faith* is generally centered on God, not humanity. Rather than focusing on human intellectual assent (or belief), the text describes God's absolute trustworthiness and demands loyalty to Him. In the New Testament, however, *faith* can mean either subjective confidence (believing faith) or the objective basis for confidence (faithfulness).

### **Resource Packet Item 1: Faith and Faithfulness**

Distribute the worksheet and assign the verses to individuals or small groups. Each verse contains the Greek word *pistis*, which can be translated “faith” or “faithfulness.” After the students have completed the worksheet, discuss the results together.

## **Part 1—Faithfulness by the Spirit Faith that Moves Mountains**

Matthew 21:18–22

**Say:** The biblical concepts of faith and faithfulness are closely related. Let’s take a closer look at each. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Entering Jerusalem on the Monday morning before His crucifixion, Jesus was hungry and noticed a fig tree beside the road. Typically, an early crop of figs would appear each spring before the leaves. So seeing the tree covered in leaves, Jesus expected to enjoy a little breakfast. Finding no fruit, He cursed the tree for its barrenness, and immediately the tree withered up. It may seem Jesus was being ill-tempered, but He was performing a prophetic act like the Old Testament prophets. The fig tree was a recognized emblem of Israel, so His pronouncement was a sign of the judgment that would come on Israel for not producing the fruit of repentance and righteousness. Amazed, the disciples asked how it was possible for the tree to wither so quickly.

Jesus launched into an exhortation on faith. “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and don’t doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, ‘May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen. You can pray for anything, and if you have faith, you will receive it” (Matthew 21:21–22, NLT).

Throughout His ministry, Jesus exposed the fruitless religion of the Jewish temple, presenting himself as its replacement. As He entered Jerusalem that Monday morning, the mountain He would have been facing was Mount Zion where the temple stood. Far more monumental than the withering of the fig tree would be the destruction of the temple and the system it represented. Both the witnessed miracle of the withered fig tree and the predicted miracle of the temple mount being essentially removed (which happened in AD 70; see Matthew 24:1–2) were examples to the disciples of the power of unwavering faith. Prayer can move mountains; faith is the prerequisite. As we live in submission to God’s will and exercise our faith, trusting in the power and love of God, the Holy Spirit’s power can accomplish God’s will in our lives—even if it seems impossible.

### **Discuss**

? Can you name a mountain God wants to remove? If you have faith, you may speak to that mountain right now.

? What is the most sudden or instantaneous miracle you have witnessed?

## Faithfulness that Pleases God

Galatians 5:22–23; Hebrews 11:1–2,6

**Say:** The Greek word *pistis* can be translated as “faith” or “faithfulness,” depending on a Scripture’s context. In Paul’s list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, most scholars conclude it is best translated “faithfulness.” This characteristic of fidelity and trustworthiness is seen throughout the Bible—first in the nature of God and then as a requirement for His servants. Jesus used the word in His parables of stewardship (Matthew 24:45; Luke 12:42). Paul encouraged Timothy to choose faithful people when passing on the gospel tradition (2 Timothy 2:2). To His followers who bear the fruit of faithfulness, the Master will one day say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21,23, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Hebrews 11 lists many biblical heroes of faith. We think of this chapter as referring only to believing faith, which is intellectual assent to the promises of God. But think of the ways believing faith inspired each hero’s faithfulness. The outcome of their confidence in God was their commitment to Him.

This so-called Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11 could also be called the Hall of Faithfulness. Noah’s obedience made him a person God could rely on. Abraham followed God’s leading, moving his family to a new land, sight unseen. Moses was faithful to the God of the Hebrews, choosing to share their oppression rather than enjoying the privileges of Egypt. Some verses in this chapter more clearly refer to believing faith (like verses 1,3,6,13–14,19,22), while others refer to faithfulness. For those who remained faithful to God’s promises—even to death (verse 13)—“God is not ashamed to be called their God” (verse 16, KJV).

Remember: the meaning of *pistis* is both faith and faithfulness. The two nuances overlap in the biblical view; one gives rise to the other. The Old Testament emphasis on fidelity (God’s absolute trustworthiness and the believer’s response of loyalty) influences the New Testament concept of faithfulness. This response of fidelity to God is reflected in both belief and behavior. Being convinced of God’s absolute love and grace produces in the life of a Christ-follower the fruit of *pistis*: both faith and faithfulness. And without that it is impossible to please God (verse 6).

### **Discuss**

? Do you think it is possible to have believing faith in God without demonstrating faithfulness to God? Explain.

? How does a Christian’s faithfulness inspire believing faith in others?

## Part 2— Gentleness by the Spirit

### The Lord Leads the Meek

Psalms 25:8–11

**Say:** The Greek word for the Spirit’s fruit of “gentleness” (Galatians 5:23, NLT; “meekness,” KJV) refers to an attitude that accepts God’s dealings with us as good without disputing or resisting. This gentleness is not demonstrated in weakness, but in power. A gentle person is like a mighty stallion under the Spirit’s bridle. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalms 25 is an acrostic psalm of David, designed to teach about prayer. In its original form, each stanza starts with a different Hebrew letter, so the psalm could be called, “A Primer on Prayer from A to Z.” In verses 1–10, the Psalmist looks to the Lord, declares his trust, and asks that none of God’s people be put to shame. He makes two interwoven pleas: for teaching and for guidance. The Psalmist appeals to the compassion and unfailing love of the Lord for him personally and then for all people. Starting in verse 11, the author takes these themes further, pleading to the Lord as an individual.

So what can gentle, humble people expect from the Lord as they pray? “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth” (verses 9–10, KJV). Three key concepts emerge in these verses: judgment, mercy, and truth.

**1. Judgment.** The Lord assures His people that in the end there will be justice for the meek. At the same time, He guides them to execute righteous judgments on behalf of others.

**2. Mercy.** The Psalmist also appeals to the Lord’s goodness and uprightness (verse 8). Although uprightness can sometimes make people intolerant of failure, the goodness of our upright God is seen in His mercy toward His people—even those who go astray.

**3. Truth.** Because of God’s rock-solid faithfulness, there is consistency between what He says and does. Convinced of God’s loving character, the meek can accept God’s dealings as good without disputing or resisting.

### ***Discuss***

? Which of these three characteristics of God—justice, mercy, or truth—gives you the greatest encouragement to be meek in your present circumstances?

? Aristotle reflected on meekness as the perfect balance between getting angry without a reason and not getting angry at all. In other words, it means getting angry at the right time, to the right degree, and for the right reason. What do you think of this definition?

### **Resource Packet Item 2: Justice, Mercy, and Truth**

Distribute the information sheet and briefly summarize it. Then encourage students to reflect on it during the week.

## **The Meek Are Not Weak**

Matthew 5:5; 11:28–30

**Say:** Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek” (Matthew 5:5, KJV). He also said, “I am meek” (11:29, KJV). What better example could we follow than Jesus? He is both the Lion and the Lamb! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus quotes from Psalm 37: “Fret not thyself . . . for evildoers shall be cut off . . . but the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (verses 8–9, 11, KJV). In the psalm, David contrasted attitudes and destinies, instructing us not to worry about those who do evil. They will fade like the grass and wither away like the spring flowers, but those who trust in the Lord and do good will dwell in the land. Because of that, we should delight ourselves in the Lord, trusting that the Lord will look after His faithful people.

In Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus extended the invitation to come to Him, learn from Him, and be like Him—the One who is meek and lowly. He promises to give rest as we follow Him and walk in the Spirit. When we follow Jesus’ example of humble, sacrificial love and “delight [ourselves] in the abundance of peace” (Psalm 37:11, KJV), we are able to bear the fruit of gentleness in our dealings with the people around us.

### **Discuss**

? What are some examples of the mightiness and meekness of Jesus?

? How can you cooperate with the Holy Spirit to develop an attitude that accepts God’s dealings with you as good without disputing or resisting?

## **Part 3—Self-Control by the Spirit**

### **Three Kinds of Discipline**

1 Corinthians 9:24–27

**Say:** The New Testament includes three words that represent different levels of discipline: the discipline of correction, the discipline of commitment, and self-discipline. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The lowest level of discipline in the New Testament could be called the discipline of correction. This is the kind of instruction and correction adults give to children. As the author of Hebrews explained, God’s discipline is not pleasant, but it is profitable (12:11). This word translated “discipline” is also found in 1 Corinthians 11:32 and 1 Timothy 1:20 (translated as “learn [not to blaspheme]”), and 2 Timothy 2:25 (translated as “instruct”).

The second level of discipline could be called the discipline of commitment. The Greek word for this concept is related to our English word “gymnasium,” carrying the idea of exercising the body toward fitness or the spirit toward godliness. Forms of this word appear in 1 Timothy 4:7–8 and Hebrews 5:14.

The highest level of discipline is the discipline of self-control. Paul urged the believers in Corinth to exercise this highest kind of discipline in their spiritual lives (1 Corinthians 9:24–27). Corinth hosted the biennial Isthmian Games, which along with the Olympic Games were part of the ancient Greek Panhellenic Games. Paul’s writing in this

passage is filled with athletic metaphors: contending for victory, running a race, boxing, and subjecting one's body to a brutal workout. This discipline—the discipline of being in control of oneself—is the fruit of the Spirit we call self-control (Galatians 5:23, NLT; “temperance,” KJV). It is an attitude produced by the Spirit that results in God-honoring actions.

### **Discuss**

? Describe a time that you experienced the rewards of self-control. What was the Holy Spirit's role in the victory?

? Name one area where the Holy Spirit is asking you to exercise more of the discipline of commitment.

?

## **Partakers of the Divine Nature**

2 Peter 1:3–8

**Say:** Most of our study on the fruit of the Spirit has been based on Paul's writings. But this passage in 2 Peter corresponds so beautifully: “God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. . . . In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises” (1:3,5, NLT). As we abide with Christ and walk closely with the Spirit, an amazing transformation takes place: We share God's divine nature. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Like many of Paul's letters, Peter's second epistle began with a reminder of what God had done before launching into what believers should do. This intentional technique highlighted the fact God has already made it fully possible for us to do what He requires, resourcing it all “by his divine power” (2 Peter 1:3, NLT).

Our Savior calls us “to glory and virtue” (verse 3, KJV)—to mirror the radiant splendor and character of Jesus. Our aim is not autonomous self-control; rather, it is “love in harness and under Christ's control.”<sup>1</sup> This is the Spirit's way of making us “partakers of the divine nature” (verse 4, KJV). He has given us everything we need in the present along with His promises for the future!

Peter instructs us “to make every effort to respond to God's promises” (verse 5, NLT) and exhorts us to “supplement [our] faith with a generous provision” of certain virtues: “Add to your *faith* virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge *temperance* [or self-control]; and to temperance *patience*; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness *charity* [or love]” (verses 5–7, KJV). Four of the virtues Peter mentions (those in italics) match Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit. The colorful Greek word for “add” (KJV; “supplement,” NLT) means to cooperate with a generous benefactor. God has made all this holy living possible through His grace; now we are to cooperate by obediently working with the Spirit.

In verse 8, Peter indicated that the characteristics he had just listed should “abound” (KJV) in believers. The Spirit-filled life should become ingrained as the believer cooperates with the Holy Spirit, and it should overflow, spilling over so that others are



blessed. The goal is to be “more productive and useful” (NLT) rather than “barren” or “unfruitful” (KJV).

### **Discuss**

? It is possible to have self-control without the Holy Spirit. What are the pros and cons of autonomous self-control?

? In what way would you most like to share God’s divine nature? What kind of submission to the Spirit would be required first?

1. Dr. Kenneth Moynagh (1913–1972), “The Fruit of the Spirit Is Love,” accessed November 10, 2022, [stornowayfreechurch.com/news/poem-on-love-by-dr-kenneth-moynagh-1913-1972](http://stornowayfreechurch.com/news/poem-on-love-by-dr-kenneth-moynagh-1913-1972).

### **Resource Packet Item 3: The Fruit of the Spirit in My Life**

Distribute the worksheet and give students a few minutes to formulate their prayers. If time is an issue, consider sending this worksheet home for students to complete during the week.

## **What Is God Saying to Us?**

**Say:** The Spirit’s fruit is visible in us when our attitudes match our Master’s. Living out Jesus’ love with integrity will look like faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We will be faithful on the outside to the faith we claim on the inside. We will show the kind of humility and gentleness that accepts God’s will without disputing or resisting. And we will control ourselves as we’re guided by the Holy Spirit. God wants His children to be whole and undivided, with words and actions that line up with our identity in Christ. Let’s submit to the Holy Spirit and marvel at the supernatural fruit He will produce in our lives.

## **Living It Out**

### **Ministry in Action**

- This week, intentionally practice both faith and faithfulness.
- Connect with a person you consider to be humble or gentle. Ask how they have learned to accept God’s decisions as good without disputing or resisting.
- Submit to the Spirit’s leading this week to live out Jesus’ character and extend His love to someone who is not yet following Him.

### **Daily Bible Readings**

Monday:

Faith Tested.

Genesis 22:6–14

Tuesday:

Justified by Faith.

Romans 4:1–5,18–25

Wednesday:

Learn in Meekness.

Psalms 25:8–15

Thursday:

Witness with Meekness.  
1 Peter 3:13–18

Friday:

Integrity and Self-Control.  
Genesis 39:5–12

Saturday:

Self-Controlled and Holy.  
1 Peter 1:13–16