Along the Way
October 7th Teacher’s Guide

Romans 12:9-21 – “Cultivating a Life That Bears Fruit – Kindness and Goodness & Service”

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

We all desire to see the Fruit of the Spirit (love, peace, self-control, gentleness...) growing in our lives and we can try hard to produce those characteristics in our lives. But the reality is, it is God through the Holy Spirit that produces that fruit in us; it is not of our own doing. We do have a role in that effort though - to cultivate an environment where the growth of such fruit is nurtured through spiritual disciplines or habits.

Just as a garden doesn't simply spring up on its own and produce fruit, we need to be intentional in our daily discipleship if we want to see the Fruit of the Spirit grow plentifully in our lives. The goal of this study is to help us to incorporate spiritual disciplines into an ongoing lifestyle habit.

Nobody likes the word "discipline." Put the word "spiritual" in front of it and it can be intimidating! Habits such as prayer, service, confession, fasting and others aren't necessarily difficult or mysterious, but they do require commitment and practice. Spiritual disciplines are foundational to the Christian life. They help us to be set free from our fears, compulsions, resentments and sorrows. They help us to discover God's joy and courage in us, to see God's face in the world, and to live lives that make God visible to others. Spiritual practices nurture patience, goodness, faithfulness, kindness and joy in us.

KINDNESS & SERVICE

As you prepare for your lesson, RE-READ Week FIVE: Kindness and Goodness & the Discipline of Service (p.47-54).

Open your class time in prayer.

Our Corporate Challenge this week was to do random acts of service, particularly those things that no one else knows about. “What did you do? What were those experiences like?”

INVITE the group to look at the statements describing evidence of the Fruit of KINDNESS in our lives on p.47 of Cultivating a Life That Bears Fruit.

ASK, “Was the fruit of Kindness one of abundance or scarcity for you? Of the statements describing KINDNESS, which ones come most easily? Which ones are more difficult?”
The first three bullets often prove to be the most challenging for folks because they involve – busyness, encouraging others and listening. Like many of the other fruit of the Spirit, KINDNESS is often squelched in us when our focus is too much on ourselves. When our schedule presses down on us it is often hard to let what might otherwise be a natural inclination toward kindness come through us and our actions. Encouraging others requires us to be more focused on the other person and what they want. And listening takes time as well as a focus on the other person.

The lesson writer describes Kindness and Goodness this way:

“Kindness, the practice of good behaviors, and goodness, through the Spirit we model God’s righteousness, are both fruits of the Spirit... Kindness is something we do on the outside and goodness is something we are on the inside. Kindness is something we do for somebody else; an action... Goodness is knowing right from wrong. It is the state or quality of being good... If kindness comes from the goodness within our hearts, then you could say, kindness is goodness in action.”

On p.47 it says, “We all want to think of ourselves as kind and good. But biblical kindness and goodness are not simply about being polite or having a pleasant attitude. Kindness and goodness as fruit of the Spirit come from understanding Jesus’ admonition to be a servant of all. It is putting others above self, not feeling in competition with others but resting in the assurance of your value in God’s eyes and therefore able to spend yourself on behalf of others without fear that you won’t be appreciated or the act reciprocated.

“Kindness and goodness flow out of the overflow in our life with God. We are blessed and we know it and we are therefore called to be a blessing.”

ASK, “Do your acts of service come from the overflow of your life with God or are they an act of will?”

The main reason for our focus on spiritual disciplines is the need for nurturing our life with God so that there is an overflow. If we are running on empty in our relationship with God, even our best acts and intentions will be sincere imitations, not God flowing and acting through us.

ASK, “What is the difference between doing acts of service and being a servant?”

You can do acts of service without a servant’s heart. Foster notes that,

“Service is not a list of things that we do, though in it we discover things to do. It is not a code of ethics, but a way of living. To do specific acts of service is not the same thing as living in the discipline of service. Just as there is more to the game of basketball than the rule book, there is more to service than specific acts of serving. It is one thing to act like a servant; it is quite another to be a servant. As in all the disciplines, it is possible to master the mechanics of service without experiencing the discipline.”

ASK, “What is the danger in simply doing acts of service as opposed to being a servant?”

Richard Foster talks about the pitfalls of self-righteous service. He says that self-righteous service:

• Comes through human effort
• Is impressed with the ‘big deal’ or the ‘grand gesture’
• Requires external reward
• Is highly concerned about results
• Picks and chooses whom to serve
• Is affected by moods and whims
• Is insensitive
• Fractures community, either by putting others in one’s debt or glorifying the individual.

ASK, “Which of these do you see as a big danger/challenge? Why? How do you address that?”

ASK, “How do we gain a servant’s heart?”

READ today’s text, Romans 12:3-21, from The Message. Ask folks to identify/write down the phrase that stands out most to them about kindness/goodness and being a servant. You may have to read the passage a second time or you can print it out for class members to look at while you read.

9-10 Love from the center of who you are; don’t fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.

11-13 Don’t burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don’t quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.

14-16 Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they’re happy; share tears when they’re down. Get along with each other; don’t be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don’t be the great somebody.

17-19 Don’t hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you’ve got it in you, get along with everybody. Don’t insist on getting even; that’s not for you to do. “I’ll do the judging,” says God. “I’ll take care of it.”

20-21 Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he’s thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don’t let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.

ASK, “What phrase did you choose?”

As folks share their phrase, TALK about ways to live out that phrase more fully. For example:

• “Love from the center of who you are.” What does that mean? How can we show kindness in ways that are authentic to us, not just things that we think we are supposed to do?

• “Don’t burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame.” As a servant, when should you say yes and when should you say no? How do you balance being a servant to your family as well as to others? How will you stay fueled in God?

• “Be inventive in hospitality.” What might that look like? Be creative!
As folks identify other phrases, invite the group to help you to ask the questions that will flesh out what that person should do next with that phrase.

In conclusion, READ the paragraph on p. 48 titled “Fruit.”

It is when Kindness and Goodness flow out of the overflow in our life with God through service to others that the world truly begins to discover the love of God.

**LOOKING AHEAD – GENTLENESS & SUBMISSION**

Be sure to practice the discipline of gentleness this week in the daily exercises, particularly the Corporate Challenge in Wednesday’s devotion to practice taking a seat on the proverbial back of the bus, letting others move to the front of the pews, tables near the speaker, and other prominent positions. Try going a whole week without bragging about something that you did, whether it is an act of service or just a personal accomplishment.

CLOSE in prayer.