

Fruit of the Spirit Sermon Series

We learn so much from children and we often find a smile coming over our faces when we hear a story about them. I love the story of a little boy in class one day who insisted on standing. He was repeatedly asked to sit rather than stand but kept refusing. This kept going for a few minutes until the teacher began to lose her patience with him and shouted at him to sit down. He finally complied and took his seat but as he did he said mutinously "I'm sitting down on the outside but on the inside I'm still standing up!"

This illustrates delightfully for us that outward conformity does not necessarily mean inner compliance. And how often are we like that in life as well? I certainly am from time to time. It only begins to make a difference in our lives when both inwardly and outwardly we move in the same direction. I strongly agree with Paul's words to the Philippian church when he says that we are to have the same mind as Christ, the same love as Christ and the same attitude as Christ. He longs for us to be transformed until we become just like Jesus.

Our lives are so busy, our schedules so crammed, our work so consuming, our focus so divided, our bodies so tired, our minds so bombarded, our families so attacked, our relationships so strained, our churches so programmed, that our lives are falling apart and we are not enjoying life as God intended us to. Jesus said I have come that you may have life and life in all its fullness.

What is God really after? What does He want to accomplish in each of our hearts so that our lives will accurately reflect the image of His Son? He wants us to live freely in the power of the Spirit for the glory of Jesus Christ. He wants us to live by the Spirit so that we might walk by the Spirit.

With these words we began a series on the **Fruit of the Spirit**. I believe it is time we started seriously living by the Spirit and saying no to the old nature that sneaks up and overtakes us. Paul clearly spells this out to the Galatians in verse 16 where he says that they ought to live by the Spirit and they will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. To do that we need to understand what living by the Spirit and walking by the Spirit mean for us today. We began by considering the writing of Paul in regard to life by the Spirit and then in the coming weeks we considered each segment of the fruit of the Spirit. What we need to understand is that the word is singular. It is one fruit not many. It is one fruit which has various segments. And so we considered the segments of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control individually and saw how we should begin and continue to live out our lives with these segments of the fruit evident in them. And by living our lives showing forth the fruit of the Spirit people will see how different we are and how happy we are, and will want to ask the question 'Why are you so

different?' And then we will be able to respond because Jesus loves me, Jesus died for me, Jesus is coming back for me, and Jesus lives in me by His Spirit.

My prayer is that we become more like Jesus and that we show forth the fruit of the Spirit in our lives day by day wherever we go and whatever we do. Then we will not be like the little boy outwardly doing what is right but inwardly rebelling, for we will openly live our lives both inwardly and outwardly displaying the fruit of the Spirit and acting like Jesus.

Walking by the Spirit - Galatians 5:16-26

We looked at *Living by the Spirit* and realised as we live by the Spirit **we have connected with Christ**. Our lives before we met Jesus Christ were lives lived in sin. We had become disconnected from God. When we came to realise who Jesus was and invited Him into our lives as Lord and Saviour we were reconnected with God the Father and at that point the promised Holy Spirit came into our lives as well. The Spirit is that deposit guaranteeing our inheritance and eternal life with Jesus. As we invite Jesus into our lives as Lord and Saviour **we have also crucified the flesh**. Paul reminds the Galatians they are to put to death the old way of living and seek to live for Jesus. His list is categorised as sexual, religious, personal, and drink related sin. It is not an exhaustive list as he concludes with 'and the like'. And we recognise **we have also cut through the pretence**. We are as we are and nothing will hide our actions, attitudes, speech and behaviour – they will reveal the truth about us. We need to stop pretending and just be who we are – and hopefully as the Spirit lives in us what we are is becoming more like who Jesus is day by day.

Living by the Spirit deals with what is in our hearts, walking by the Spirit with how that works its way into practice. *Walking by the Spirit* has to do then with the practicalities of our lives, the out-workings of our lives, the actions in our lives. As we walk by the Spirit **we mature in character development**. Paul writing to the Ephesians in 4:15 says 'we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.' We are to grow to become more like Jesus. This takes time though. Just as babies take time to develop into toddlers and then infants, then children and then teenagers, before reaching adulthood and maturity – I must have been a slow developer! – so as Christians we mature in character development over time. **We model Christ-like attributes** as we walk by the Spirit. In John 15, we are reminded that for a branch to bear fruit it must remain or abide in the vine. We are called to remain in Christ and he will produce fruit in our lives – we will become more like him. And this fruit, as we highlighted at the start, is singular. The one kind of fruit the Holy Spirit produces in us is Christ-likeness. Christ Jesus displays each of these attributes in His life and as we become like him so we too show forth the fruit of the Spirit collectively and singularly. And finally **we make consistent decisions**. Temptations come in life and the devil will try all he can to tear us away from doing

good and following Jesus. We need to be reading and learning Scripture to aid us in our walk. We need to be constantly in prayer asking the Lord to help us live consistent lives. And we can also build up a support network around us of people who can walk with us, encouraging us and challenging us when we make mistakes and wrong decisions.

Love: Love Always - 1 Corinthians 13

As we continue to consider the Fruit of the Spirit, we want to keep remembering that the fruit will characterise us as Christians. We long to be more like Jesus and to show that fruit in our lives in order that we might love this community around us and win them for Jesus. We turn next to love and the words of Paul in that greatest passage written about love remind us we are to love always. It doesn't matter where we are, what we are doing, or who we are with, we ought to be showing and sharing love. I want us to consider the love of God and Jesus Christ as seen by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 and to remind us to love always.

The first thing we learn of love in 1 Corinthians 13 is of **love's primacy**. Love is uppermost in Paul's mind and he suggests that it is over everything else. We always need love says Paul in our Christian lives. Without love we are nothing and without love we will make no impact on the community around us. Love needs to become the primary motive for who we are and for everything we do. Paul has already told the Corinthians in 8:1 that love builds up. When spiritual gifts are used in love they build up the body of believers, but when we go about life looking out for ourselves it destroys relationships. Love is first and foremost says Paul. Love is the primary attitude we need in life. Jesus lived a life of love and shared that love with all whom he met. Let us make sure love is primary in our lives.

From love's primacy Paul goes on to discuss **love's properties**. What is the nature of love? What makes love different from everything else? Paul uses fifteen verbs to describe love to us and to show us how to live out our lives sharing love. It is interesting that he uses verbs. You see a loving person will behave in a certain way; he or she will do, and not do, certain things because of the kind of person he or she is becoming. These are also attributes of love that Jesus showed in his life and ministry as well. And they are attributes we would do well to try and emulate in our lives day by day. As Paul uses these verbs we see both what love does and does not do. They all sound so simple and straightforward and yet if you are like me they can be difficult to exhibit always in our daily lives. And of course in the Greek these verbs are in the present continuous tense - this means that these actions and attitudes are continuing and are becoming habitual.

Paul reminds the Corinthians and us of **love's persistence**. Love never fails. It never ends. It never gives up; it keeps on going and going. The Greek word is 'píptei' which

literally means falls or collapses. Love will never fold under pressure. It remains solid to the end. And of course does that remind us of the love of God. He could so easily have given up on us but he didn't. He loves his creation and longed to save us and redeem us despite our sin. Jesus' love persisted to the end as well. He could have fallen under the pressure of being beaten and rejected and sent to the cross. In the garden he prayed that the cup be taken from him. He was desperate to find another way. And yet he prayed 'your will be done'. He knew the only way to save us was by his death on the cross and he persisted to the end. His love was so great. And so God's love still persists as he longs that none should perish. He is giving humanity as much time as he can to allow them to find Jesus before he sends Jesus back to the earth for the final time.

And finally of course we see **love's permanency**. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Love will never fail and it will endure forever. It is going nowhere. All the gifts Paul has been talking about in chapter 12 will one day come to an end. There will be no need of them in heaven. But love? Love will endure forever. It will last forever. For into eternity God will still love us and we will still love him. The challenge to us in our modern world is to **love always**.

Joy: Joy is Found by Abiding in Him - John 15:1-11

It's interesting that the second segment of fruit listed within the fruit of the spirit is joy. Jesus wants us to live a joy filled life. In John 10:10 he said 'I have come that they may have life and life in all its fullness.' He wants us to have fun. And so as we turn to John 15:11 we read 'I have told you this so my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.' How do we find this joy? How do we get it into our life? How do we enjoy living? Well according to this passage joy is found by abiding in Jesus.

Joy is found firstly by **abiding in Jesus' presence**. Jesus begins by saying in chapter 15 that his Father is the gardener and he is the vine. We are all branches that are found in that vine. If we belong to Jesus, if we have accepted the salvation he offers, then we are his. A good gardener will prune his crops regularly so that they bear much fruit. The Father is no different as he chips away at our lives to make us more fruitful and to make us more like Jesus. Jesus says in verse 4 that we are to remain in him and he will remain in us. The Greek word here is 'meno' which means to remain or abide and is a favoured word of John's in his gospel. To abide means to stay where we are. The Christian has been placed in Christ; and in daily walk then we are to stay in intimate fellowship with the Lord. A branch abides in the vine by drawing all its life and nourishment from the vine. So we abide in Christ by spending time in his presence.

In His presence we spend time in **prayer**. Paul writing to the Thessalonians says in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 'Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances,

for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.' We remain joyful when we pray at all times. Even in the most dire of circumstances we are reminded to give thanks to God.

As we abide in his presence we are also to be reading and obeying **His word**. Jesus says in verse 7 'If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you.' For His disciples Jesus' words were the words He has been sharing with them up until this point in time. For us we abide in His presence by reading the written word concerning Jesus – the bible. We read the bible for it's is God's instruction book for us. We ought to read it often. I am reminded of the story of a mother who during the day took a few moments to unwind by reading the bible. After seeing her do this for several years, her four-year-old daughter became concerned: 'Aren't you ever going to get finished reading that book?'

As we abide in his presence we also learn to live and be in the company of others. We need **fellowship with His people**. It is great to be together on a Sunday worshipping God together as a group of believers. The writer to Hebrews reminds us to not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing. It is good to meet together. Jesus promised that where two or three gather in his name there he will be also. When we gather together Jesus is present and so we abide in his presence.

Jesus goes on to tell his disciples that not only is joy found by abiding in him and in his presence through prayer, reading his word, and in fellowship with other believers, but it is also found by **abiding in his love**. Verse 9 says 'As the Father has loved me so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.' Once we discover in life that Jesus' loves us and died to save and rose again in order to one day take us to be with him in heaven for ever, we never want to leave his love. We want to abide in that love. We abide in His love by **remembering His love** for us. Jesus said as the father has loved me so have I loved you. God the father loved Jesus with an everlasting love. And so Jesus loves us in the same way. God had a great love for his creation longing that none should perish but all come to a saving faith. Jesus loves that creation as well and stepped up to the cross in order to provide redemption for his people. And so as saved and redeemed people we ought to live in light of that love. We ought to constantly remember what God has done for us through Jesus and to sing his praise. We ought to live for him day by day.

The other way to abide in His love is to **keep his commands**. Jesus tells us in verse 10 'If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my father's commands and remain in his love.' We are to obey his commands. Which ones we are quick to ask. When I think of that my mind goes back to the expert in the law who quizzed Jesus in Matthew 22:36 as to what the greatest commandment was. Jesus responded by saying 'Love the Lord you God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: love your neighbour as yourself. All the law and prophets hang on

these two commandments.' Someone once said that if we obey these two commandments we meet all the others as well. You see when we love God we will not have any other gods apart from him. We will not worship idols or take his name in vain. And if we love our neighbour, we will not want to bad-mouth them, or harm them, or see anything bad happen to them.

Jesus remained in the constant enjoyment of his Father's love. This was because he lived as his Father guided. Nothing ever came in the way of that loving fellowship. Jesus found his own deep joy in communion with God his Father. He wanted his disciples to have that joy that comes from dependence upon him. He wanted his joy to be theirs. The Lord taught that real joy comes by taking God into one's life as much as possible. Jesus says that he wanted their joy to be complete or as the Greek more aptly means to be full or fulfilled. Their joy would be fulfilled in abiding in Christ, in his presence and his love.

Peace: Still Waters Run Deep – John 14:1-31

Jesus longs for us to be at peace in this world and those still waters of contentment run deep when we trust completely in Him. Yes life will be hard at times, but we ought to strive to not give in. In this passage Jesus has just celebrated the Passover with His disciples and explained to them that He is about to die. He has instituted the Lord's Supper (Communion). He has told them He is about to leave them and they have troubled hearts. **The problem with troubled hearts is doubt** sets in. We are no longer sure and certain of who we are, what we are doing, or who we believe in. All kinds of questions spring into our minds when we begin to doubt. The same was true for the disciples in John 14. In the first 4 verses Jesus commands them not to worry and to continue to 'pisteu' to believe in him and to trust him. He continues by telling them where he is going and what he is doing.

The problem with a troubled heart is not only doubt but it is also **dread**. When circumstances overtake us we become so consumed by them that we always fear the worst. We dread what is coming and what will happen next. And when we begin to dread our lives are full of worry and anxiety and we cannot live at peace. The disciples had just spent the best part of 3 years with Jesus. They had experienced good times and bad, but they had been with Jesus and learned so much. They looked up to and admired Jesus. They knew what Jesus could do. Their lives were happy and contented when they were with Jesus. But now he had told them he was about to leave them. They were dreading how they would cope. They were worried about what they would do now. They had left everything to follow Jesus.

Another problem with a troubled heart is **discouragement**. The disciples were on a roll with Jesus. They had seen him heal people and just recently he had raised Lazarus from the dead. Then they had entered Jerusalem to the welcoming shouts of the

people. Everything was going just fine until Jesus' bombshell dropped that he was leaving them. At this they began to be discouraged, fearing what would come next. The question of Thomas was not only caused by doubt but it was also coming out of discouragement. When we are with you we know where you are going and everything is fine. But if you're going to leave us how will we know the way. They were discouraged.

And the final problem with troubled hearts is **desperation**. When troubles overwhelm us we become desperate. We will cling to any hope we can. We desperately seek a way out, a solution. Thomas was desperate when he asked how he could know the way. Philip was desperate when he said 'Show us the Father.' They were desperate for any glimmer of hope and a way out of the situation they now found themselves in. The trouble with desperation is that it can lead us to do so many things that we would not normally do. When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus in the garden, Peter grabbed a sword and chopped the ear from one of them. He was simply desperate to save his friend. We do unusual things when we are desperate.

Jesus does not want us to have troubled hearts and problems. He longs for us to be at peace and to have contented hearts. How can we stop our hearts from being troubled? Jesus told the disciples right at the start - 'Trust in God, trust also in me'. 'Believe in God, believe also in me.' When troubles beset us we should look to God and remind ourselves of all that he has done for us. For there are **promises for a contented heart**. We can have **confidence** - The Bible is full of God's promises to His people and each one has come to pass. The only outstanding promise yet to be fulfilled is the promise of an eternity spent in heaven for us all - what a day that will be! A contented heart also gives us **courage**. The disciples had the courage to do as Jesus said and stayed together until the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was sent to them. They then had courage to go out and do things on their own which they had never done before. Not only did Peter stand and preach to the crowds but in Acts 3 we see Peter and John telling the crippled beggar to rise up and walk in the name of Jesus. And he did! With contentment comes **comfort** as well. The disciples were comforted by these words. 'Do not let your hearts be troubled, trust in God and trust also in me.' They knew Jesus and so they could trust him. What he said would come true. When we live peaceful and contented lives there is a level of **contentment** in our lives that nothing can disturb and upset. We are content with our lot in life. We are content with what lies in front of us. We are content because one day we are going to spend eternity with Jesus in heaven. What a glorious thought.

Patience: Patience of Jesus

Jesus was a very patient man. That is not to say he didn't lose his rag once in a while for we well remember the turning of the tables in the temple when he ordered the money changers to leave his Father's house. But in general he was patient to the very

extremes of what happened to him and around him. Let's look at some snapshots in Jesus' life and examine four areas of patience.

He was ***patient in preparation***. As we consider his temptation in the wilderness in Luke 4:1-13 we see that His careful preparation in the Scriptures helped Him. He took time to learn for himself the Scriptures and how to act and respond in life. We ought to do the same by reading our Bibles daily, praying often, meeting together often to share and grow to become more like Jesus. He was patient in preparation of others. He spent time with his disciples and trained them up. We can do the same with younger Christians and those seeking to learn more about the Christian faith.

Jesus was ***patient with interruptions***. I still struggle at times with interruptions when I'm doing something important. In Luke 8:40-48 we see Jesus being interrupted as he sets food on dry ground once more. He agrees to go and help Jairus' daughter. But on the way He is interrupted again and He stops to speak with the woman who has touched the Hem of his cloak. She was special to Jesus and Jesus wanted to speak with her. Jesus always saw interruptions as opportunities. Let us strive to do the same in life.

Jesus was ***patient in persecution***. We find that so difficult at times but at times that is when we grow. Let's never be ashamed of our faith and stand firm in difficulties and persecution. Jesus stood before Pilate in Matthew 27:11-26 and having answered one question remained silent as others were asked. He was patient in a very trying situation. The natural reaction for us when someone is accusing us of something is to defend ourselves and to get our point across. We want to tell them the truth. Jesus was patient under persecution for he knew it was part of the Father's plan.

And Jesus was ***patient with sinners*** as we read in Luke 23:32-43. As He is nailed to the cross, Jesus prays that God forgives those who are doing this. They are sinners who need a Saviour. And then He turns to one of those criminals being crucified alongside Him and saves him. 'Today you will be with me in paradise.' Despite what sinners do to Jesus - the insults they throw, the abuse they give, the floggings He endured - He was patient with them to the end. Remember how patient He has been with us. Let us try and be as patient with others that we might win them for the kingdom.

Kindness: The Good Neighbour - Luke 10:25-37

A teacher of the law had come up to Jesus and asked Him a question about how he could inherit eternal life. I suspect from the text that this man was not so much interested in finding out about it as testing Jesus. The Greek word is 'ekpeirazon' meaning to tempt or test. The expert in the law probably thought he had it all worked

out. If he kept learning and working hard he could earn eternal life. Of course, we know that it is only because of God's amazing grace that we can be saved and that through faith, not by works so that no-one can boast. Jesus then asked him a question and in the ensuing conversation Jesus told a story to illustrate the need to show kindness and exhibit love. The story is familiar to us – the Good Samaritan.

The thieves saw a victim to knock over and Jesus explained that this poor victim was travelling through the hillside which was a favourite haunt for robbers and thieves – evil men intend on causing harm and distress. This man was **stripped** of all his clothes and possessions, **struck** as they knocked him over and beat him, had his possessions **stolen** from him, and was left **stranded** as they took off.

The religious men saw a nuisance to keep clear of we learn next. These men were those who were looked up to and followed in society but each chose to ignore the man. The first to come was a priest – priests fulfilled many duties in those days but primarily in the temple where they would offer up the prayers and sacrifices for the people. A Levite came by next and Levites were those who worked alongside the priests and would carry the utensils and keep guard over the sanctuary. They could not perform the duties of a priest but were there helping out. We read that they **noticed him** but that is as far as it went. They crossed to the other side and **neglected him**. They may have had their reasons for neglecting him and leaving him – touching a stranger who appeared dead would defile a priest or Levite and cause him to undergo a period of ritual cleansing before he could fulfil his duties again. They may have been busy and in a rush somewhere or indeed they may simply have been scared they too would be attacked. Either way they chose to neglect this poor victim.

Finally we see **the Samaritan who saw a man in need of kindness**. Jews and Samaritans were enemies and yet this man stops to help. He has **compassion** on the man and makes **contact** with him in order that he might care for him and help **cure** him from his injuries. And all of this **cost** the Samaritan. It cost him his time as he tended to him and cared for him. It cost him financially as he arranged for him to stay in an inn. And it probably cost him as he had to lay aside his pride and prejudices to help.

The point Jesus was making to the expert in the law of course was that this Samaritan acted as a neighbour to the poor victim in the story. He was ready and willing to get involved and to show kindness. Jesus told him to go and do likewise. To be kind to those he met and show his love and God's love in action.

We can exhibit and show kindness in exactly the same way. We need to be willing to notice people and their situations in life. We are given many divine appointments during our daily lives. People will mention something to us which at first may seem insignificant but is actually a cry for help and support. We will see people struggling in

life and crying out for someone to touch them and help them. What will we do and how will we respond. Will we neglect them like the religious men in the story?

Jesus was teaching that to love God and love our neighbour we need to act kindly towards them. In performing acts of kindness we not only share the love Jesus has given and shown to us but we also point people to Jesus. They will listen and respond far more to our practical help and kindness than they will to words. Let's get out there and show kindness in everything we do.

Goodness: Walking with the Wounded - Mark 5:22-43

Jesus came into this world to walk with the wounded and to bring comfort, healing and support. His goodness shone through as He walked with them and talked with them along life's narrow way. We considered Jesus walking with the wounded and saw what we can learn about living lives filled with goodness to all humanity. Jesus met **people of faith**, people who had no doubt heard of Jesus' ministry and compassion and came looking for him. They didn't have faith as we describe it now as a complete trust and faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. But they came with the little faith they had to the one they hoped would help them. The first we encounter was **an official** who was an important man in the town. His daughter was dying and no cure had been found. Despite his fear of what his colleagues might have said at the temple, remember they had already begun to despise Jesus, he was desperate to save his daughter. Then we come across **an outcast**. This woman has been bleeding for 12 years - that is 144 months or 4,380 days. Imagine the turmoil she is in and she has spent all she has trying to get well. She is an outcast in society because of her illness. According to the law (Leviticus 15:19) she was ceremonially unclean due to this bleeding. Anything or anyone she touches becomes unclean as well.

As they come to the Saviour we see their **plea of faith**. As people come seeking Jesus they always come wanting or needing something in particular. We hope that they come recognising their sin and shame but sometimes they come before that with a more immediate need to them. The man comes and **states** his plea. His daughter is dying and he wants Jesus to come and help. Jesus heads to his home and as he does they encounter the woman he makes her plea of faith and it is **silent**. She tries to sneak in unnoticed and touch the hem of Jesus garment. Touching him will be enough for her - that's how strong her faith is.

And finally we see the **power of faith** and again the goodness of Jesus. The power of their faith is Jesus. The object of their faith is Jesus. And they hang on to that faith with great power and determination despite interruptions and distractions. They know Jesus is the one who can help and heal, and their faith grows stronger and we see the power of that faith being outworked.

As Jesus is on his way there is the **interruption by the woman**. She touches his garment. Despite Jesus rushing to the official's house He stops and seeks out the woman. He wanted her to know that he not only heals physical conditions but he heals spiritually as well. Tenderly he says to her 'Daughter' Note the use of the word daughter. 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from suffering.' Jesus wants to make her whole again. The power of faith – the power of Jesus as he exhibits goodness and heals her.

Then we see the **interruption by Jairus**. His friends tell him his daughter is dead and they no longer need Jesus. But Jesus says to him that he is coming and all will be well. Jesus does not mind the interruptions. And Jairus I think still had the power of faith in him to allow Jesus to come to the house. And of course his daughter is healed.

Let us walk with people on their journey through life. Let us recognise their pleas of faith, both the spoken and the almost unnoticeable, and let us point them to the one who they need to have faith in. Jesus is the power of our faith. He can transform lives. Our job is to show kindness and goodness as we walk with the wounded on their journeys and to point them to Jesus. Jesus can and will do the rest.

Faithfulness: Faithful to the End – Matthew 26:36-46

As we turn to this passage we see Jesus entering the Garden of Gethsemane with His disciples and we see that despite the temptation to give up and walk away, Jesus remains faithful to the end. He has come to earth to fulfil God's plans. God wanted to save humanity, to be able to offer them forgiveness and a way back to a right relationship with him but the only way to do that was for a just God to punish someone so that the rest could go free. Jesus, God's own Son, was to die on the cross paying the punishment which was ours so that we might go free, that we might enter back into that loving relationship with him, accepting the forgiveness he offers.

Jesus goes into the garden and takes only his closest disciples into the inner garden with him. He tells them to watch and pray whilst he goes a little farther to pray on his own. In the garden he **experienced great distress**. The NIV tells us he began to be sorrowful and troubled. The Greek tells us he was 'Lupeisthai' which means grieved or sorrowful and that he was 'ademoneiv' which means distressed. Distressed goes further for me than troubled. He has already shared with his disciples in John 14 that they are not to let their hearts be troubled – Greek word 'tarassestho' which means to be disturbed, troubled, or stirred up. Jesus was not simply disturbed at this point in time. He was deeply distressed. He knew what lay in front of him.

He also **endured intense sorrow** and he said to the disciples 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.' Jesus knew fine well what was in front of him and he was beginning to feel the anguish of all of that. As human beings we feel pain and

sorrow as we think of the pain that lies ahead sometimes. Jesus was fully human as well as being fully God, so he experienced the pain and sorrow we face and endure. And Jesus was enduring intense sorrow. The Greek word here is 'Perilupos' which means deeply grieved.

He also **encountered loneliness**. He had to be alone as he faced what was to lie ahead. And alone he prays. And notice how Jesus views prayer – it is a necessity. Even in the darkest and hardest of times prayer is essential. When the going gets tough and intense and the pain is intolerable, prayer is a necessity. Jesus knew this. When the most crucial and demanding action in the history of the world was about to unfold it had to be rooted in prayer. Jesus knew it was essential. He was alone in the inner garden as he prayed. As he goes back to the 3 he had taken with him he finds them asleep.

Jesus **expressed agonising prayer** - 'Abba Father' as Mark writes in his record of this encounter. 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.' Jesus wanted to know if there was any other way; any other way to save us from our sin; any other way that we could receive forgiveness; any other way that our punishment could be accounted for. Jesus was agonising over this prayer. He knew what lay ahead. The pain, the agony, the suffering, the loneliness, the rejection, the crucifixion. We read in Luke's account that Jesus prayed more earnestly and sweat drops of blood fell from his brow. He was expressing deep and agonising prayer at this point in the garden.

Then Jesus **extended complete resignation**. He didn't do it sadly or reluctantly, he did it because as he had prayed 'My father if it is possible may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will but as you will.' And 'My Father if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.' Jesus wanted to follow his Father's plan and so he extended complete resignation to the plan. Jesus' love for you and for I compelled him to carry on and to be faithful to his Father's plan. He knew that there was no other way and this was God's will and plan. He was strengthened there as he received the answer in the garden to his prayer and he knew he had to do the Father's will.

Jesus **enjoyed special comfort** as he knelt in the garden. As Jesus sat lonely in that garden I believe he was comforted by the Lord. How can I be so sure? For if we turn to Luke's account of this event we read in Luke 22:43 'An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.' God the Father knew what His Son was about to experience. It would break the Father's heart to watch His only Son die on the cross of Calvary. And yet God the Father knew that this was the only way to atone for the sins of humanity. A just and loving God had to make sure punishment was meted out for sin and yet in his love for us he sent his son to be the sacrifice in our place. As

Jesus agonised in the garden looking ahead to what was to come, God the Father sent an angel to comfort him and to strengthen him.

And finally Jesus **exhibited renewed resolve**. Returning the third time to his disciples and finding them sleeping still for their eyes were heavy, he wakens them up. With a spring in his step and exhibiting renewed resolve, Jesus has arisen ready to face the hours that lie ahead. He knows what is about to happen and yet he is now ready to face it. The garden of sorrow has turned to a place of strength.

How faithful are we in our walk with God? When difficulties come do we shy away and forget to pray asking for God's help and guidance? Or do we remain faithful to the end?

How faithful are we in responding to God's call on our lives? He has called us to spread the good news locally, nationally and internationally – are we faithful in obeying that call? Let us be known as those that are faithful and may we be faithful to the end.

Gentleness: The Saviour's Gentle Invitation - Matthew 11:25-30

Gentleness is amiable and tender, not harsh or severe but rather mild and soft. Gentleness reaches out to the unlovely and draws the in tenderly. We come to consider the words of Jesus. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." For in these words we see the Saviour's gentle invitation to all of us who need him and need rest from the troubles of this world.

Who is the invitation from? The invitation comes from Jesus Christ, God's own Son. This is Jesus, the babe who was born in a manger in a dirty smelly stable for there was no room at the inn far less the palace. This is the babe whom the local sitting king wanted murdered. This is the babe who grew into a young man and turned the tables on the money changers in the temples courts. This is the young man who healed on the Sabbath breaking the religious leaders so called rules. This is the young man whom the ruling authorities wanted killed for he was a danger to them. This is the young man who as he walked the earth healed the sick, made the blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear; this is the man who brought Lazarus back to life; this is the man of Jewish descent who spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well, and gave her rest and healed her spiritually; this is the man who loves everyone no matter what background they come from or what standing they have in life or how sinful they happen to be – he loves all humanity just the same. And his desire is that they might all be healed spiritually and enter into new life through him. And he still desires that today!

To whom does Jesus extend the invitation? He says in verse 28 'come to me all you who are weary and burdened.' 'Weary' evokes the image of people exhausted from their work or their journey; tired with life and all its struggles; fed up with living the way they live; encountering the same thing day in and day out; weary of being kept down by the love of drink or drugs or sex or money or whatever other vice it is; weary with getting old and frail and not being able to do the things we once could.

'Burdened' indicates for us people who are weighed down with heavy loads in life; coping with the partners who abuse them physically, mentally or emotionally; struggling with children who are out of control and will not heed a word that is said to them; struggling to make ends meet because of a lack of job or having a poor paid job or trying to live off a pension; buckling under the weight of cancer or some other life threatening illness; struggling maybe just with having to live when life is not as fun as it once was; burdened with the weight of sin upon our shoulders – those things we ought never to have said or thought or done.

Jesus' invitation is to those who need rest, those who were finding life a struggle and weighed down with worries and anxieties. His invitation is not just for the few either – he says 'come to me all you who are weary and burdened' – all! He wants everyone who is struggling with something in life to come to him.

What is Jesus offering? Jesus is offering us rest - rest from the worries and anxieties of life. Ultimately of course he is offering us rest for our souls. He goes on to say in the passage that he is gentle and humble in heart. It is in gentleness he comes and offers us rest. He tells us that if we take his yoke upon ourselves we will find rest for our souls. Jesus wants to save us from the burden of sin. And notice all we need to do to find rest is to come to Jesus. Jesus says 'take my yoke upon and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.'

What does Jesus expect of those who wish to respond? Jesus wants us to believe in him and trust in him. He wants us to accept his offer of forgiveness and to follow him. He wants us to learn from him and to grow to become more like him. So yes there is a cost involved. Jesus expects us to learn from him. He expects us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, minds and being, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. He expects us to follow God's guidelines for good and healthy living. These things will cost us. But his yoke is easy. For you see these things do not bind us up, they do not make life difficult for us, and they do not cause us more of a burden. These things will liberate us and set us free to live the way God intended us to live - to enjoy life and to have life in all its abundance.

The Saviour's gentle invitation today is 'come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.' Will you come to him today?

Self-Control: Self-Control in the Face of Temptation - Matthew 4:1-11

A three-year-old entered the kitchen when his mother was busy elsewhere in the house. He pulled a kitchen chair over to the counter and climbed up on it. Then he took the lid off the cookie jar and had just gotten the cookie to his mouth when his mother entered the room and demanded to know what he was doing. The three-year-old looked at her with big, innocent eyes and said, "I just climbed up here to smell the cookies, and my tooth got caught on one of them."

We laugh at the child's innocence and forgive him for his fib. But temptations in little things only lead in later life to temptations in big things. The pattern of lies and deceptions we tell others and ourselves only becomes more elaborate in adulthood. And temptations are big things for us as they occur often in our daily lives. As we reach the last in our series on the Fruit of the Spirit we come to self-control and the best example of self-control I see is when Jesus was being tempted after his baptism.

At **Jesus' Temptation** we meet the **tempter**. He is described to as the devil in v1. The devil is a false accuser and slanderer; that is what the word means. When we come face to face with the devil we should never expect the truth. He lies about God, he lies about our friends and he even lies about our enemies. Nothing truthful comes from him. His desire is to take us away from what is right and towards that which is evil. His ultimate desire is to keep us out of an intimate relationship with God. He is also described in v3 as the tempter. As the tempter he comes to test us. He wants to test our faith, our loyalty, our commitment, and our strength. He wants to see how strong we are and to tempt us to turn our backs on what is true to follow his lies. He tempts and tests us to the maximum he can as well. And in v10 he is Satan. Satan is the father of evil. The word means enemy or adversary. His desire is not to befriend us for he is bitter and twisted. His only desire is to keep us from doing good and following God. He is a tricky character who will try whatever he can to pull us from walking upright lives.

The tempter comes to Jesus and we see the **temptations** Jesus faced. Temptations to meet personal needs and wants, temptations for fame and fortune, and temptations for power and control. He tempts Jesus to turn the stones to bread for he is hungry after spending forty days in the desert fasting. By doing this people will see Jesus' greatness and he will not need to undergo the suffering of the cross says the tempter. He tempts Jesus to jump from the highest point of the temple and in this performing a spectacular and stunning stunt people will get to know Jesus. And then he tempts him to bow down and worship him and he will give him all the nations of the world – he will be ruler of all. Of course, Jesus will one day be ruler of all when he comes again in glory.

Jesus faced up to temptation and remained self-controlled by using the **tools** at his disposal. He has read and learned Scripture – the **Word of God**. He is able to call it to mind when he needs reminded of God's goodness, love and power. He uses his **faith** in God the Father. He knows God's plans will come to pass so he remains faithful. And he uses the tool of **prayer**. He talks often to his Father.

And from his self-control in facing temptation the **blessings** come. Angels come and attend to Jesus and meet his needs. Ultimately Jesus will be blessed after his death and resurrection by being seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

We face the same temptations in life so we ought to learn from the master. **Our temptations** come from the very **same tempter**. The devil prowls around with his lies and deceit; the tempter tries to tempt us off course; Satan wants to devour us. In 1 Peter 5:8-9 we read 'Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.' He tempts us with the **same temptations** - temptation to preserve life and eat food; to lust after what our body needs or wants. Food, water, designer gear, fancy house or car or TV; tempting us to do what we need to, to get these. The temptation for fame and fortune – to make a name for ourselves. Forget about following God's plans, get rich quick and get well known in the process. The more people who know you the better it will be for you and the more influence you will have. And of course the temptation to gain power. To be in control, to be in charge, to run the roost and to have everyone work under you and report to you. Do we not face these very same temptations in our daily lives?

With the same tempter and temptations we are in for a stormy ride. But the great news is we also have the **same tools** at our disposal: the Word of God, faith and prayer. We have the Bible which we can read and learn from. We should keep reading and learning. But don't just read. Jesus was able to quote the verses from memory. We need to be memorising the Bible and quoting it to ourselves when trouble comes and we are being tempted. We also need to keep our faith in God. He has promised many things in the Bible and each has come to pass. And we have the tool of prayer. Jesus constantly communed with his Father in this way. We have the same access directly to God through Jesus. We can pray and ask him all things and he has promised to hear our prayers and answer them. Keep praying when temptation comes. And we have the **same blessings**. God will watch over us by His Spirit and care for us. He will save us – Jesus died on the cross for that very purpose. And one day we too will be in heaven for all eternity. God's blessings are rich and bountiful.

So the challenge to today is to be self controlled in the face of temptation. Temptation will come. We face the same tempter and temptations Jesus did, but he has shown us how to overcome them. We need to use these tools of the Word of God, faith and prayer often to combat the tempter that we might be self-controlled in difficult situations and not give in to temptation.