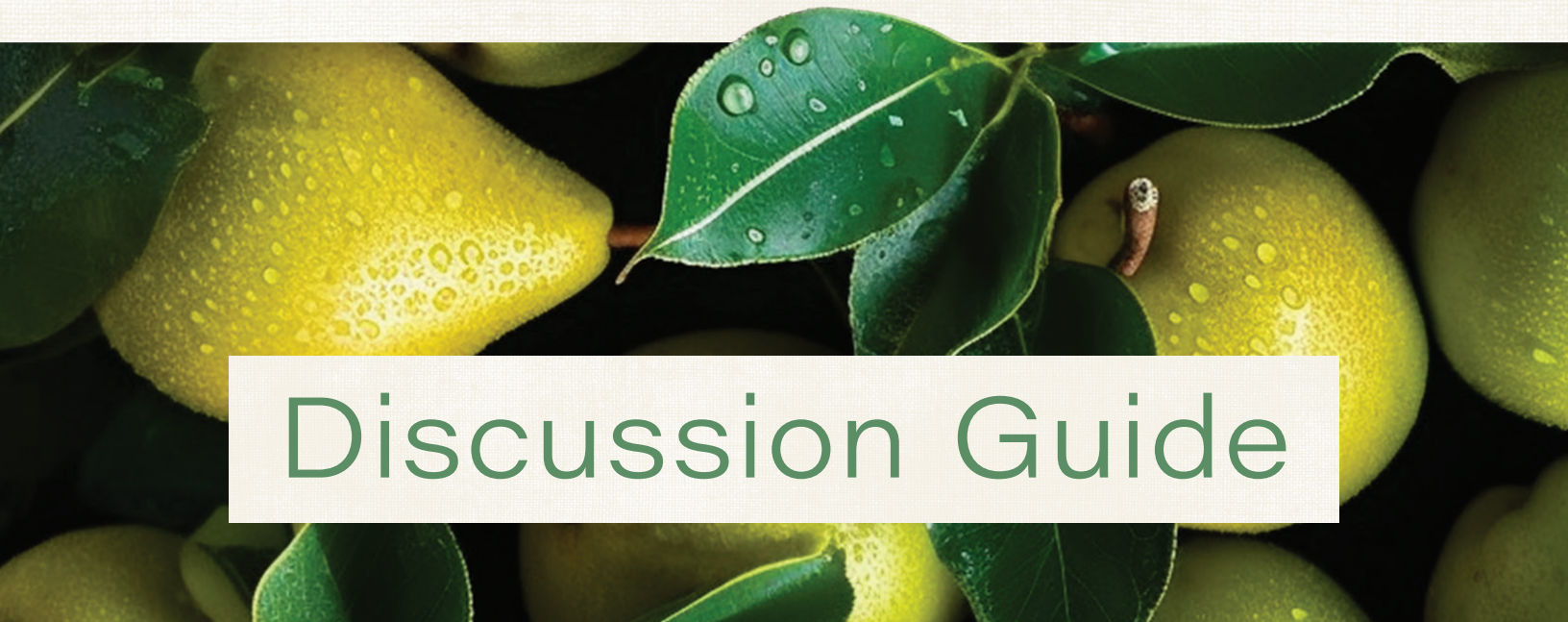




Flourish

GRACE-CENTERED PRACTICES TO PROTECT
AND GROW A FRUITFUL LIFE IN CHRIST

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Discussion Guide

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Chapter One

The Status Quo Has Got to Go!

1. Which of the nine displays of the fruit of the Spirit do you identify as particular strengths of yours?
2. In which of the nine displays of the fruit are you hoping for greater growth?
3. What does abiding in Christ look like in your life? How easy or difficult is it for you to consistently abide in Christ? Why?
4. How has the enemy tempted you to doubt God's Word regarding the fruit of the Spirit in your life?
5. How have you become vulnerable to the enemy's attacks through either pride or shame?
6. Which component(s) of the armor of God do you "put on" most consistently? Which do you put on less consistently?
7. How have you been trying to cultivate the Spirit's fruit in your own strength?
8. Which portion of the fourfold approach (recognize the enemy's tactics, nurture a right perspective, recover and grow, share the harvest) do you expect will provide the greatest surprises for you? Which do you anticipate will give the most familiar results?



Chapter Two

The Heart of Our Fruit Is Love

1. In what relationship have you tried harder to love the other person without success? Why did trying harder fail?
2. When have you been tempted to withhold love from someone you determined to be undeserving? How does this compare with God's love for you?
3. When have you been tempted to withhold love from someone who did not treat you the way you thought you should be treated?
4. How does knowing that God not only is loving but is *love* help you understand the nature of *agapé*?
5. During a typical day, what does loving the Lord with all your heart look like? Loving the Lord with all your soul? Loving the Lord with all your mind?
6. How does knowing your identity in Christ enable you to love well?
7. What does it mean to surrender to God in order to love better?
8. If our ability to love others indicates our love for God, how satisfied are you with your level of love for God and others?
9. How was the Good Samaritan's love extravagant? What holds you back from loving extravagantly? (Note: Extravagant love is not limited to financial extravagance.)
10. Which "neighbor" is God calling you to love in practical ways? How will you love that person this week?



Chapter Three

The Song of Our Fruit Is Joy

1. How has your suffering or the suffering of a loved one caused you to give up on joy?
2. Joy comes when we recognize how God is working out His purposes in us even through suffering. Think about a season of suffering you have experienced. How did God grow your relationship with Him through that time?
3. Describe a time when you were able to comfort or encourage someone else because of the comfort God gave you in a similar situation.
4. How has discontent decreased your joy?
5. How has busyness for God diminished the joy of relationship with Him?
6. In what ways has your relationship with God become a duty—an obligation?
7. In what area of life are you in the *have-to* stage? What needs to change for you to move to *want-to* or, finally, to *get-to*?
8. When was the last time you shared the gospel with someone? What prevents you from sharing the gospel more often?
9. How is God calling you to increase someone else's joy through encouragement this week?
10. How can you help in the spiritual growth of others by volunteering in your church? Ask your pastor(s) where the needs are. (Be sure there's a soft chair behind them in case they fall—pastors aren't always used to people offering to help!)



Chapter Four

The Soul of Our Fruit Is Peace

1. How might worries about the future be controlling your thoughts or stealing your peace?
2. What current situation have you been trying to control in an attempt to gain a favorable outcome?
3. Of the three elements—noise, hurry, and crowds—which has the enemy successfully or consistently used to disrupt your peace?
4. From the parable of the king's contest, how does the king's definition of peace relate to your life today?
5. Tozer wrote, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."¹³ If this is correct, how have your thoughts about God's nature helped or hindered your peace?
6. Why is thinking about peace as a commodity instead of a Person a barrier to experiencing the fullness of this fruit of the Spirit?
7. Consider a specific situation that spoils your peace. How might flipping the script on your what-ifs change your perspective?
8. Are you a peacekeeper or a peacemaker? How might God be calling you to make peace rather than keep peace?
9. In which of your relationships have you avoided speaking God's words of true peace?
10. Who is God calling you to forgive? Will you share the fruit of peace by extending forgiveness to this person today?



Chapter Five

The Test of Our Fruit Is Patience

1. How do you naturally respond to waiting?
2. Anger, fear, unforgiveness, pride: Which of these motives have tempted you to impatience? Why?
3. Why might practicing patience with people be more difficult than patience or endurance in circumstances?
4. Who in your life consistently causes you to lose patience? Why does this person trigger impatience in you?
5. Is it easier for you to be patient with acquaintances or with family members? Why?
6. How has the Lord taught you to wait on Him?
7. How might rushing to spare a loved one from pain interfere with what God is doing in that person's life? How do you know when to step in and when to wait?
8. Who in your life needs to see hope communicated through your patience with them?
9. What does it look like for your spirit to be still as you wait on the Lord?
10. Does God have you in His waiting room today? What might be preventing you from waiting joyfully?



Chapter Six

The Generosity of Our Fruit Is Kindness

1. How has the enemy tempted you to redefine God's kindness as you struggle with a particular situation in your life?
2. The greatest kindness we could receive is the gift of a restored relationship with God. He extends it to us through the sinless life, sacrificial and substitutionary death, and miraculous resurrection of His Son, Jesus. If you have not yet received this gift, receive it today. If you have, take time today to thank Him for His infinite kindness to you.
3. God demonstrated His kindness to us in salvation. How does He continue to express His kindness to you as you walk with Him each day?
4. Why do you think the concept of random acts of kindness is so popular?
5. What is your greatest area of struggle in expressing kindness: thoughts, words, or actions? Why?
6. How have you grown in expressing kindness compared to last month or last year?
7. Think back over this past week. How have you shown kindness to others? What opportunities to show kindness do you wish you could reclaim?
8. What do your words reveal? Are they helpful and gentle, reflecting the overflowing love you have because the Father first loved you? Or do family and friends need a microscope to detect tiny touches of kindness that occasionally leak out?
9. How do you treat those who have betrayed you or are undeserving in other ways?
10. How can you extend kindness to someone who is hurting right now?



Chapter Seven

The Virtue of Our Fruit Is Goodness

1. Have you been in a situation in which you were tempted to doubt or redefine God's goodness? How did you respond to that temptation?
2. When has pride tripped you up to display good works with a wrong motive? What was the result?
3. When have you found yourself clinging to something other than God's goodness?
4. When God does not answer your prayer request in the good way you think He should, how do you hold on to your faith? What is your "even if" right now?
5. When has God's goodness toward you not felt good? How do you respond when God's goodness comes in the form of correction or discipline?
6. Describe a time when a taste of God's generosity toward you led you to cling to His goodness.
7. How frequently do you thank God for His goodness to you in specific ways? How can you be more intentional about thanking Him regularly?
8. Who is God calling you to encourage today? How will you help them persevere?
9. Describe a time when God used a fellow believer to spur you on to persevere.
10. Think of a person who has wronged you or who considers you their enemy. How can you be generous in doing good to that person this week?



Chapter Eight

The Devotion of Our Fruit Is Faithfulness

1. How faithful are you in the small things, especially when no one is watching? Where have you been tempted to cut corners for convenience?
2. How can you guard against compromising your faithfulness in both the major issues of life and the seemingly inconsequential ones?
3. Why might some think faithfulness is secondary to other priorities? What does this devaluing of faithfulness reveal about our prioritization of trust and dependability in our culture?
4. How has God revealed His faithfulness to you in good times and in challenging times?
5. How can you apply the biblical examples of those who have gone before us to recover and cultivate the fruit of faithfulness in your life today?
6. How do God's fulfilled promises to the church help you remain faithful to Him today?
7. Can you identify an idol of comfort or convenience that prevents you from living faithfully? What do you need to change?
8. Who in your life has exemplified God's faithfulness?
9. How will you use reminders to cultivate faithfulness in your life, whether blessing prompts, physical reminders, celebrations, testimonies, Communion, or songs?
10. How can you be more intentional about stewarding your time, talents, and possessions?



Chapter Nine

The Character of Our Fruit Is Gentleness

1. Which of the five schemes of the devil (pride, unconfessed sin, unforgiveness, worry, uncontrolled tongue) are you most vulnerable to regarding the fruit of gentleness?
2. When you think of God, does the characteristic of gentleness spring to mind? Why or why not?
3. How does the biblical definition of gentleness differ from the way our culture defines it today?
4. How does seeing the gentleness modeled by Jesus change how you view God the Father?
5. Why do you think submission to the Holy Spirit is so critically linked to the fruit of gentleness?
6. Consider the five approaches to standing against Satan's schemes and recovering the fruit of gentleness. Which do you think will be most helpful to you? Why?
7. Were you surprised by how often the Bible encourages gentleness? Which area linked to gentleness surprised you the most? Why?
8. How might God be calling you to express gentleness in serving others this week?
9. When you are disrespected or angry, what do your words reveal about your relationship with Christ? What might need to change?
10. What did you think about Elisabeth Elliot's prayer regarding silence? How easy is it for you to remain silent in the face of conflict or adversity?



Chapter Ten

The Discipline of Our Fruit Is Self-Control

1. Which of the four temptations are you most susceptible to: selfishness, unbridled emotions, the blame game, or dismantling God's boundaries?
2. Were you surprised that self-control is a character quality of God? Why or why not?
3. Why is self-control foundational to our ability to live out all the fruit of the Spirit?
4. What is the status of your own "walls of self-control"? Where are the breaches?
5. How does self-control free you to reflect Christ?
6. Do you think of self-control as a gift? Why or why not?
7. What prevents you from fully applying the gift of this fruit in your life?
8. How do you reconcile the apostle Peter's urging to "make every effort" to develop self-control with the fact that self-control is a gift?
9. How easy or difficult is it for you to be authentic as opposed to stoic when you are hurting?
10. Are you more like Peter in his early days when he struggled with self-control or in his later days when he valued this fruit of the Spirit? How does submission to the Holy Spirit help you in this area?

