

# 10 Ideas: Reflecting the Fruit of the Spirit

How long since you've had a checkup to assess your spiritual health?

By Scott Williams

Not long ago, a seasoned marathoner had just crossed the finish line with an impressive time when he suffered a heart attack and died. From the outside, he looked to be the picture of health, but a fatal condition was hiding on the inside. Every one of us needs an occasional visit to the doctor for a checkup to make sure everything is working alright and that we don't have an unknown serious internal condition.

The same is true with our spiritual lives. As creatures of habit, we tend to go through life on autopilot. We often miss clues that indicate that our spirit is not enjoying the good health that God created it for.

In the same way that the doctor puts us through a battery of tests to diagnose potential physical problems, God has given us a process of evaluating spiritual problems in our lives:

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (Galatians 5:22-23)*

Each of these is a characteristic of the Holy Spirit's active presence in our daily activities. Let's look at each one and ask some diagnostic questions to make sure we're healthy.

**1. Love.** This word for love doesn't refer to warm feelings but to a deliberate attitude of good will and devotion to others. Love gives freely without looking at whether the other person deserves it, and it gives without expecting anything back.

*Question:* Am I motivated to do for others as Christ has done for me, or am I giving in order to receive something in return?

**2. Joy.** Unlike happiness, joy is gladness that is completely independent of the good or bad things that happen in the course of the day. In fact, joy denotes a supernatural gladness given by God's Spirit that actually seems to show up best during hard times. This is a product of fixing your focus on God's purposes for the events in your life rather than on the circumstances.

*Question:* Am I experiencing a joy of life on a regular basis, or is my happiness dependent on things going smoothly in my day?

**3. Peace.** It's not the absence of turmoil, but the presence of tranquility even while in a place of chaos. It is a sense of wholeness and completeness that is content knowing that God controls the events of the day.

*Question:* Do I find myself frazzled by the crashing waves of turmoil in my life, or am I experiencing "the peace that passes all comprehension" (Philippians 4:6-7)?

**4. Patience.** Other words that describe this fruit are lenience, long-suffering, forbearance, perseverance, and steadfastness. It is the ability to endure ill treatment from life or at the hands of others without lashing out or paying back.

*Question:* Am I easily set off when things go wrong or people irritate me, or am I able to keep a godly perspective in the face of life's irritations?

**5. Kindness.** When kindness is at work in a person's life, he or she looks for ways to adapt to meet the needs of others. It is moral goodness that overflows. It's also the absence of malice.

*Question:* Is it my goal to serve others with kindness, or am I too focused on my own needs, desires or problems to let the goodness of God overflow to others?

**6. Goodness.** While kindness is the soft side of good, goodness reflects the character of God. Goodness in you desires to see goodness in others and is not beyond confronting or even rebuking (as Jesus did with the money changers in the temple) for that to happen.

*Question:* Does my life reflect the holiness of God, and do I desire to see others experience God at a deep level in their own lives?

**7. Faithfulness.** A faithful person is one with real integrity. He or she is someone others can look to as an example, and someone who is truly devoted to others and to Christ. Our natural self always wants to be in charge, but Spirit-controlled faithfulness is evident in the life of a person who seeks good for others and glory for God.

*Question:* Are there areas of hypocrisy and indifference toward others in my life, or is my life characterized by faith in Christ and faithfulness to those around me?

**8. Gentleness.** Meekness is not weakness. Gentleness is not without power, it just chooses to defer to others. It forgives others, corrects with kindness, and lives in tranquility.

*Question:* Do I come across to others as brash and headstrong, or am I allowing the grace of God to flow through me to others?

**9. Self-control.** Our fleshly desires, Scripture tells us, are continually at odds with God's Spirit and always want to be in charge. Self-control is literally releasing our grip on the fleshly desires, choosing instead to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. It is power focused in the right place.

*Question:* Are my fleshly desires controlling my life, or am I allowing the Spirit to direct me to the things that please God and serve others?

**10. Walk by the Spirit.** While not a fruit of the Spirit, the final item on the checkup produces all nine qualities listed above. When we follow the Spirit's lead instead of being led by our self-focused desires, He produces the fruit.

But even when we don't walk by the Spirit, He is the very one who convicts us that things are not in proper order in our lives.

God promises that if we are willing to admit that we have been walking our own way and ask for His forgiveness and cleansing, He will empower us through His Spirit to live above ourselves and live the abundant life for which He has created us.

*Question:* Am I actively depending on the Holy Spirit to guide me in God's ways so I don't get wrapped up in myself? If not, am I willing to confess to God that His ways are better than mine, and that I need the Spirit's guidance to live above the fray?