

Stay Focused to Bear Fruit

Carl H. Stevens Jr. is pastor of Greater Grace World Outreach located in Baltimore, Maryland. Pastor Stevens is also chancellor of Maryland Bible College & Seminary and host of the international Christian radio program "The Grace Hour." This booklet was created from a message preached by Pastor Stevens.

Pastor Stevens can be seen weekly on cable television stations throughout the United States. Call us for information regarding programming in your area.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

GRACE PUBLICATIONS

P.O. BOX 18715

BALTIMORE, MD 21206

Printed in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A.

Copyright © 2002

Grace Publications is a ministry of
Greater Grace World Outreach, Inc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 5

Chapter 1 7

LIFTING THE LIMITS ON DIVINE ACTIVITY

Chapter 2 11

DECISIONS FOUNDED ON LOVE

Chapter 3 16

BREAKING THROUGH TO MATURITY

CONCLUSION 22

INTRODUCTION

In the principle of sowing and reaping, we have a great provision from God. The provision is this: If I sow liberally, I will reap liberally from God. If I sow a few seeds from the Word of God, then I will reap very little from God.

Furthermore, God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that he shall also reap. If he sows to the flesh, of the flesh he reaps corruption. But, if he sows to the Spirit, of the Spirit he will reap everlasting life. (See 2 Corinthians 9:6, Galatians 6:7-8.)

We have an incorruptible seed, according to 1 Peter 1:23—the precious Word of God. Incorruptible, it is a seed that lives and abides forever.

When we are not sowing the Word of God, we are limiting God, and that limits our fruit bearing. Yet, when we sow in the fruit of the Holy Spirit, we allow God to remove the limits, and we can reap His abundant life.

This booklet examines how we can develop

godly fruit, expressed through godly behavior, by allowing God to cultivate and manifest His attributes in our lives.

Chapter One

LIFTING THE LIMITS ON DIVINE ACTIVITY

“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23).

“Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

“For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:6-9).

“Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel” (Psalm 78:41).

Many believers consistently allow patterns

of negativity to take over their lives. Here is the problem: If, when certain things happen, we react in a situation rather than respond to the Truth, we limit God. We limit Him through our negative emotions, our fears, and our insecurities. And when we start limiting God, we reveal that we really don't know Him intimately, nor do we have a proper understanding of His nature. We need to remove limitations we put on God in each area of our need by making right decisions to abide in Him.

We must recognize that Satan wants us to abort the incorruptible Word and cause us to live in spiritual birth defects. I have seen this happen to young people in our Bible college. They answer God's call, come to school, and then fall into a relationship before they have had an opportunity to be established in their studies. The educational process in the Word of God is often aborted in these cases. A relationship entangles them, they lose their focus, and division enters into their hearts.

This is why people should be so careful while they develop relationships. A relationship should never interfere with your relationship with God. Pure, healthy, no—touch love should not demand hours of your time on the phone, to

the detriment of your prayer life and your communion with God. Learn to grow in grace and knowledge, and you won't become paralyzed—limited in your fruit bearing because you limited God.

Jesus Christ became paralyzed in His humanity when He bore all of our sins on the Cross. He limited Himself by dying so that we might be liberated in His life. The Lord Jesus emptied Himself so that we could be made full.

The Will, Our Faith, and God's Grace

My will, my faith, and God's grace: Put them together and something wonderful happens. Each has a specific part to play in my life. By grace through faith, I made a decision in my will to ask Jesus into my heart and I received eternal life. And now, I grow and bear fruit by continuing in the same process. As my human behavior comes under the power of the incorruptible Word of God, my thoughts, my feelings, and my confessions bear the fruit of godly behavior.

This process, where the natural becomes divine, is so precious. Any relationship I have should be governed by godly behavior. In my marriage, I initiate to my wife with godly

behavior and she responds in a godly manner. And as I initiate and respond in a godly way to my friends and co-workers, I will discover that I have eternal friends who will stick by me in the worst of times. Proverbs 18:24 says, "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

I have had people say to me from time to time, "I don't have any friends." I don't mean to sound simplistic, but Proverbs 18:24 provides a very meaningful truth. Anyone who shows himself friendly can have great friends wherever he goes. If I want to have friends, I have to initiate a pattern of being friendly. Wallowing in depression and need, just waiting for someone to initiate to me, won't help matters.

The point is to stay focused on Christ, and let Him have preeminence in every relationship. When He is allowed to be your source of life, people will want to be around you just to partake of the fruit of the Spirit that pours out of your life.

Chapter Two

DECISIONS FOUNDED ON LOVE

“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5).

Life is made up of one decision after another. Life is won or lost in the details of making those decisions. A winner makes decisions to win. Losers, somewhere along the line, have made decisions to lose. That is why our decisions in the details of life are very crucial.

Hebrews 13:5 is a great verse to study and to help us understand the value of right decisions. Anyone who is saved is in Christ. We are new creatures, and this means we have a new standard of living. All of our old standards have been left behind. The old things have passed away and all things have become new to us.

We are not creatures of discipline, but creatures of habit. Of course discipline is necessary,

but God does not want us to consider discipline first. Cultivating good habits must come first. As we cultivate good habits of thinking and speaking, we apply discipline to continue in them.

When discipline is attached to a legalistic system of works, it is both dangerous and vain. It is a form of bondage that causes people to limit themselves and the Holy Spirit from producing God's fruit in their lives.

Equal and Unified

"But the *fruit* of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

"Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

The Word of God says that the fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, which produces a godly walk and, consequently, godly behavior. It is the antithesis of the works of the flesh. In the original text, "fruit" is singular, pointing to the fact that all the elements of God's fruit are one. These are not "works" of the Spirit; these are qualities that the Spirit is effectually cultivating in us and through us.

When this process is at work in an individual, he is being led by the Spirit, living by the Spirit, and being taught by the Spirit. The Holy

Spirit Himself produces the fruit of the Spirit in him.

The original text of Galatians 5:22-23 reveals that a singular verb (“is”) introduces the things that describe what love is. Each characteristic is presented equally; they are equal and united, describing the believer’s inward, outward, and upward disposition.

This is how this principle works. The fruit of the Spirit is love; and that love is one reflection, with eight expressions or emanations that are equal and intertwined. Joy is equal and united to love because love produces joy. Only a foundation of love makes the soul compatible to the other characteristics of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the joy that I have in my heart becomes my strength for one reason: it is equal and united to love. Furthermore, my peace is perfect only when God’s love produces it. Peace is equal to and one with love and joy because of what the love of God in Christ has done in my heart.

Joy and Peace

“And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour”

(Ephesians 5:2).

This verse should give us a new understanding of what it means for us to walk in love. If you are struggling in your marriage, exercise divine behavior and walk in love. Physical sickness—for you or a loved one—may be troubling you. Let the fruit of the Spirit supply joy and peace. Not joy because of the sickness, but joy because you know that God will do what is right, according to justice that has been satisfied. No matter what happens, He will make it work together for divine good.

It may seem as though He is silently standing by, disinterested. He is not. It may seem as though He doesn't care about your severe back pain or your very serious heart condition. He does care. His mind is upon you, and He is with you in whatever is going on. Something will be worked out so that God can reveal the very nature of His love to you and through you.

“And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart” (Jeremiah 24:7).

Lust is any need we try to fulfill outside of the will of God. So, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh if we walk in the Spirit of God. Being

filled with the Spirit as we walk in love is one of the most sacred ways to experience God's presence. It is the premise for motivational thinking that comes from a heart that is filled with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, *that we may know Him.*

Chapter Three

BREAKING THROUGH TO MATURITY

“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men” (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

Here, I want to focus on the subject of breaking through to maturity by having a ministry of God’s righteousness and a heart of reconciliation. This kind of heart has a powerful desire to help people be restored so they can live in spiritual health.

The words “longsuffering” and “patience” are from the Greek word *makrothumia*, which speaks of having patience toward people (Galatians 5:22). This is patience that produces divine behavior, even in one who is injured and hurting. The grammar indicates that *makrothumia* is something we receive from God by His actions toward us. Longsuffering endures the injuries

inflicted by others in the midst of irritating, provocative circumstances. It is the quality of having faith-rest, even in the face of Satan's attack.

Gentleness and Goodness

"Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy gentleness hath made me great" (2 Samuel 22:36).

"That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

After longsuffering, in Galatians 5:22, we have the word "gentleness." *Chrestotes* is the Greek word, and it is defined as a kindly disposition toward others that is both pure and upright. Though we may not always actively express gentleness, God is going to show us this kindness throughout all eternity (Ephesians 2:7). Gentleness that is expressed as the result of love always demonstrates kindness. It is one of the most pleasing characteristics of the Holy Spirit.

Everyone appreciates kindness. A new person from the inner city came to our church recently and said, "It seems like no one has been this kind to me since I can remember." She was just aching to experience plain and simple kind-

ness, and the Body of Christ expressed it to her.

As the fruit of the Spirit reveals kindness, it also reveals goodness. "Goodness" (*agathosune* in the Greek) is the act of demonstrating joy, peace, longsuffering, and kindness through a godly life. Divine goodness keeps us, teaches us, and forgives us through grace. Romans 2:4, speaking to those who judge others, asks, "Despise thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" When goodness disciplines, it is always through grace and mercy. Therefore, be merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful (Luke 6:36).

Faith, Meekness, and Temperance

Finally, we have faith, meekness, and temperance.

"Faith" (*pistis* in the Greek) refers to an act of the will determined to express trust in God's promises. It is based on the conviction that what God has said is the truth, backed up by the witness of the Holy Spirit. Whether it is the faith of Abraham (Hebrews 11:8, 17), the faith of Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:16), or the faith of the operation of God (Colossians 2:12), faith believes with great confidence and assurance that God is who

He says He is.

“Meekness” (*prautes* in the Greek) describes a gentle disposition in relationships, in contrast to harshness. A person who is meek willingly gives up his right to go his own way in order to be led in God’s way.

“Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13).

I learned to recognize the qualities of faith, meekness, and temperance from certain missionaries I met as a young pastor. I learned so much just from watching them, observing their lives behind the scenes. None of them would let me open or close my own door. They were true servants, always manifesting humility in the sight of men and meekness before God.

One gentleman had lost his wife and two daughters to a terrible sickness while they were serving God on the foreign field. Physically, he struggled to walk because of a severe limp. Meanwhile, his denomination had begun to question the validity of the Bible on certain points. That left him with no choice but to leave the organization, which also meant to give up his means of financial support. Still, he stayed in

his call, alone and without finances, and for a time eating wild berries as his main supply of nourishment.

Yet, when this man stepped up to the pulpit of our tiny church of sixteen members, all he could say was this: "Folks, God has been so good to me. I will never know why He even allows me to speak to you. He has done nothing but treat me like a king."

Now, that was lesson of meekness that I have never forgotten. This man of God imparted to all of us the things he had learned from God as he walked with Him.

The final characteristic we will speak of is "temperance" (*egkrateia*). Often, temperance is wrongly defined as "self-control." But in fact, temperance is *divine* control exercised through the Holy Spirit's singular fruit of love. Temperance characterizes the new creature as one who has availed himself to be God's workmanship and not his own. This speaks of a believer who has learned to focus on the things of God, and as a result he bears much fruit.

I will never forget what one missionary friend told me years ago. "You are very successful," he said to me. "Be very careful of your success." I took that right to heart. Success can

cause even a good man to lose sight of the One who is in control.

The Holy Spirit seeks to maintain His control to show that every expression of this fruit can flow in us and through us, so that we can manifest—and make visible—our God who is invisible. But that comes only when we focus on the prize of the high calling (Philippians 3:14), reckoning ourselves to be dead to self and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:11).

CONCLUSION

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16).

The fruit that we manifest is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. That manifestation becomes the evidence of who God is toward us, in us, and through us.

I love to have the Holy Spirit witness with my spirit. It is far more than a witness that I am a child of God. My spirit bears witness of the Holy Spirit’s fruit when it is being expressed through another believer. Certainly, we are not to live by our feelings; yet, we know that the good feelings that come from healthy emotions can help us to go on when circumstances would cause us to grow faint.

Remember that God never evaluates us on the basis of what we do. One preacher may have a congregation of thousands, while another may serve a group of twenty. Both, however, stand

before the Lord. The issue is what we are before God. We are called to reflect the love of God: one source, one reflection, expressed through eight characteristics, all equal and undivided. If we focus on His Life and walk in the Spirit, we will reflect that life by the fruit of the Spirit. That's all that matters.