

**WITH LOVE**  
**Live Fully**  
**Dr. George O. Wood**

Today again the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22. Just beginning to launch into this series with an introductory message last week. Today we're going to look at the first fruit, the fruit of the Spirit is love. Live fully with love.

It's not an accident that the first fruit of the Spirit given is the fruit love. No other fruit of the Spirit can develop in our lives unless love is present. In fact as we will go on to look at the remaining fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22\_23 we will find that all the remaining fruit simply describes love in action. Love for example rejoices. Show me a person that's a loving person and I'll show you a happy or joyful person. Love brings peace. The opposite of course is anxiety and stress. Love perseveres or patiently overcomes. False love simply checks out. Love shows kindness. Love brings forth the best. That is love displays goodness. Love never deserts but stays faithful. Love gentles. Love displays self-control.

If you think of the fruit of the Spirit in terms of a tree we would say that the roots of a tree reach down into Jesus Christ from which all nourishment and life is drawn. There can be no fuller development of fruit of the Spirit in our lives unless our roots are in Jesus. But the trunk of the tree is love. And from that trunk come the other branches. The branches of joy and peace and gentleness and kindness and the other attributes of the fruit of the Spirit. Love is essential. It is the trunk. Christ is the nourishment from which the roots of the tree draw their strength.

How do we become more loving persons?

It seems to me that as I analyze it there are three mistakes that are commonly made in terms of what it takes to be a loving person.

One mistake is some people have the idea that love is just an automatic thing. You have it or you don't. It requires no effort to develop. It is a feeling state, which exists or doesn't exist. It's something that happens to you rather than a disposition of life within you.

It's fascinating therefore to read the New Testament and find that the New Testament never assumes that we will know how to love simply because we are humans or even simply because we have asked Christ into our life. The presence of the Lord in your life is not of itself an automatic guarantee that you will begin loving well overnight as he loved. For love is not only a gift Christ gives us but it is a disposition that is created through modifications in our behavior as Christ lives in us.

The New Testament therefore is filled with instruction on how a loving person functions. We are for example told by the Lord that we're to love our neighbor as ourselves. That's sort of a beginning stage. Ultimately we go past that and find the Lord telling us to "Love one another as I have loved you." Then we're told "Love not in word only but also in deed." Paul tells us in Romans chapter 12 and Ephesians 5 that there is a whole pattern of behavior that is associated with developing love. "Be devoted to one another with brotherly love." Honor one another above yourselves. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Live in harmony with one another. Do not repay evil for evil. Do not let the sun go down while you are angry. (One of the greatest ways love is defeated is by carrying

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anger.) Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs. Be tenderhearted to one another forgiving one another as Christ forgave you.

All of these phrases from the New Testament describe how love behaves and the admonitions are needed because we do not automatically know how to love. I think most people love babies. Babies are not in a real condition to return love. Especially when they're real tiny. They must be served. They demand through tears and crying their bottle or attention or a playmate's toy or change of diapers. Their world at that moment even though they're so darling, is self-centered. And if they grow up and never change can you imagine an adult when every time the adult needed something let out a wail and shrieked? Then, on the other hand, you live with somebody like that so you know what that's all about.

If a baby is to ever come out of the normal world of infant self-centeredness they must come to know that they are loved. They must be loved and they must be shown love. If a baby is not loved and if a baby is not shown love we know that serious personality disorder may result.

Love is not developed automatically. Christian love is not developed automatically. The people that take the attitude that love is something that happens to you and if you're one of the lucky ones great. They are people who are poor lovers and they usually provide themselves an excuse for not loving by saying they cannot change they way they are and basically they're waiting for someone else to change.

Love does not happen automatically.

The second mistake in regard to being a more loving person is that we will think that we can express love once we know its definition. We preachers are great for giving you the Greek New Testament words for love. There is an importance to that. There are four Greek words for love. But just because a person knows the definition of love doesn't it any way tell you whether or not they love. I'm all for knowing the definitions within love but that will never of itself produce behavior changes in you or in me.

A third mistake about becoming a more loving person is that we would underrate the evil or the rutted behavior in us. It is hard to change. I have preached sermons on love only to go out from a service and myself say something unkind. Those things do happen, unfortunately they do happen. They happen not because we don't want to be loving persons but just simply we have to deal with rutted behavior, the way we typically react. The emotional charge we feel within a worship service may not of itself change behavior once the benediction is said. So we need to be alert to the fact that as James tells us hearing the word is never sufficient of itself.

How can I therefore be more loving? Is there any hope if I am in rutted behavior I can be more loving. My purpose now as a friend and a pastor is to be pragmatic and say to persons here who sincerely ask that question to give us all some handles that can augment the development of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. The fruit of the Spirit, the love of Christ.

If I were to give a prescription of how to develop love in your life if you want to live more fully with love I would articulate the development of six qualities.

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First there must be desire. Honestly from within us we must want to become more loving. We must come to the Lord with that desire and say to him, "Help me to love." Maybe we ought to add the name of the person or persons we're having difficulty loving.

Such an honest prayer will immediately do four things. It is a psychological matter of honestly recognizing our need. When we pray that prayer we realize we do not love fully and we have need for change and that is good.

Secondly, it tells the Lord that we want to change.

Thirdly, it focuses our attention on desiring the Lord to love in us. It focuses our attention on loving rather than simply being loved. All of us would like to be loved more. The trick is to be more loving ourselves and to pray, Help me to love, is to focus the change where it's needed most in our own disposition.

Fourth, praying that prayer will open our heart to the activity of the Lord, to his presence and to his help in our life because he does hear our prayers. And he does move in especially when we come to him with desire.

A second step in becoming a more loving person is that I've found that loving people are secure people. Show me a person who is having difficulty loving or expressing love and I will inevitably show you a person who is also having problems with their security.

An insecure person is most concerned about what other people think of them. How they like them. On any given day an insecure person's happiness is directly related to someone else's approval. Or someone else feeding their popularity. Such an insecure person is focusing on what other people feel and think. Unfortunately most time when your attitude is that way you feel that other people are thinking negative things about you. So it kind of becomes a closed in world.

And insecure people inevitably fixate on what is someone else thinking. What is someone else saying? How can I better improve myself so that someone else will not set in judgment upon me? How can I be accepted? How can I be part of the group?

All those concerns focus our attention on change outside of us. Somebody outside of us needs to change.

Whereas a person moving in security knows that the real key is not necessarily changing anybody on the outside but it's change from within.

How do I become a more secure person? This is especially difficult question. I wouldn't under-rate its difficulty. If you have been as a child exposed to a great deal of insecurity in your life, like a baby you must know that you are loved. You must be loved.

I love God because he first loved me.

I have no difficult envisioning God loving people in groups. In thousands and hundreds of thousands and millions. I have had a rough time understanding and knowing that God loves me

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personally and I was worth so much to God that he would send his Son to die for me. Yet the scriptures time and time again send this doctrinal truth as well as emotional truth to us that God does love us and love us completely and wholly and unconditionally accepts us. When we begin to know that, when that begins to permeate our being we begin to be rooted in a security that we are loved.

I found that there are certain affirmations or prayers that are upon my being. I may not always pray them with these same words but they are prayers that are very important to me in which I find security as a person. "Jesus, I know you love me. Your love was proven to me on the cross. Every time I am tempted to doubt whether or not I am loved by you remind me of the cross. It proves the limit that you will go to, to love me and to save me. Jesus, I am worthwhile or you never would have died for me. You don't die for junk. Jesus, I know you are working everything for the good in my life. I believe that this will result in my good even though it is difficult to go through and you are giving me not only the power to survive but you are giving me the power to succeed. I believe that. Jesus, continue to cleanse me when what I do or think what is wrong. And thank you for loving me when I'm not performing at 100%. (Sometimes it's not even 50%.) Jesus, live your life through me. Help me to speak and to see and to hear and to touch as you. Jesus, help me this day to live my life outside myself. Help me to go to the needs of another and live not for myself alone.

I'm not at all pretending that praying these prayers automatically guarantees that I am a perfect person. But I find that as I pray and think in these ways that God gives me a security that I know is outside myself. God does form security in our inward being. I know who I am when I know who I am to God. That is so critical. I am loved. I am wanted. I am beautiful. And you are too.

Those truths give me further courage to encounter God's love at a deeper level of my life. In so doing I can love others more fully.

A third step in becoming a more loving person is the training of the tongue, who can tame it. My tongue gets me in more trouble than anything I know of. Probably yours too. The tongue is devastating in respect to love misfiring.

We fail to express love in two ways. One is we may be silent when we should speak. When a child or a friend needs encouragement, needs approval we stand on the sidelines and don't express ourselves and don't encourage that which we have just seen. So speech can get us in trouble when it's not expressed.

And as well it gets us in trouble by cutting down when we should build up. How tragic it is to hear the confession of an adult who has struggled with feelings of insecurity all his life and blurts out through tears, Daddy never once told me he loved me.

Some of you are from homes where a parent or even both parents never verbally expressed loved to you. It's very difficult therefore for you to live with security. But your insecurity will be in God as you grow. God can give you the courage to change so you don't pass on the heritage you received.

I think it's tragic that a child is made subject of negative speech. That a child may be told, You'll never amount to anything! You're stupid! You're always getting into trouble! Every

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time I see you I know there's trouble! You can't be depended upon. You're not as smart as your sister.

We need to identify and see destroyed these negative tapes which have been programmed with and ask the Lord to erase the tape and put in their place other tapes which reflect his speech and his love for us.

There are families where words are like rocks, which wound and maim and destroy. But loving speech builds up.

How can I develop more loving speech?

First, I must develop a vocabulary of praise and blessing. And not just praise toward God but praise toward other people. Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8 that our minds are to be upon what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, or anything excellent or praiseworthy. We're to think about these things.

I might say that if our mind should be on those things our tongue should be on them as well. There are some things that are true but they are not noble. They're not excellent. They're not worthy of talking about. They're true but they're not lovely. They're not admirable. We ought to always keep the balance that just because something's true doesn't give us the right to go ahead and say it.

We will never build anyone up by cutting them down. I learned that from experience.

The second thing to be more long in your speech is that when you correct you should not destroy. Obviously speech cannot always be praiseworthy. Sometimes we must correct. Sometimes we must disagree. Sometimes we must express a concern or an opinion that differs from what another person sees. An example of how to deal with situations in a moment like that is seen for us in Paul's letters where it is his practice to commend before he corrects. If we are always using correcting speech without the preface of commending speech we will wind up crippling others and we will drive negative patterns into people rather than helping them out of what we are seeing that is wrong in them.

A third thing about our speech is it must be genuine. Our words must reflect the realities of our heart. How do we learn to love? First by having desires, second by becoming secure, third, by talk, which builds up.

A fourth way we love is to forgive and not hold grudges. Hurts if we get them in us and don't take care of them, don't get them lanced, don't get them cleansed they are going to poison our whole system and we cannot express love to others if we are living with uncleansed hurt and with unforgiveness in our life. Unforgiveness becomes a plug that dams up the reservoir of love in our life and though we may want to love there is that plug there of unforgiveness which keeps love from flowing out of us. The only way that we can love is to ask God to pull the plug or give us strength to pull the plug. We must live in forgiveness even when we are the person who clearly was wronged. For our own sake we must forgive.

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A fifth way to grow in love is to physically express your love. I'm all for the huggers and kissers. I think they have away of showing us about love. If we are to express love we must come out of ourselves and physically express that love. Reach out and touch someone!

Sixth and finally, love is fueled by commitment not emotion. You will not be a great lover of people or a person simply because you are emotionally attached to them. Something deeper must occur than emotion. Something must happen in your will. Emotions vary. We feel good or we feel bad. Commitment stays. Emotion requires that the other person return the same feeling. But commitment goes on caring regardless of whether the feeling is returned or not. Emotion is attracted to beauty. Commitment is drawn to need.

If your love for a person is simply because they are a visual feast there will come a time when, twenty years down the road, they are going to look like me or worse. Love has to be fueled by commitment. Love is the determination to put another's highest and best welfare first. Loving our neighbor as ourselves gets us started on the road to love but there is a higher way. There's a higher level. That is to love one another as Christ loves us. That's the grad school form of love.

Had Jesus governed his life by his emotions he would have fled the cross. But his love drew from his commitment to put our welfare above his own. Greater love has no man than this for an enemy, for a stranger. Commitment is essential to love.

Are you living fully with love? If you are not living fully with love take this message today as a prescription. Write the points down. Let's begin putting it to work in our everyday world.

Our heavenly Father, we come to you in this moment realizing that you are the God of love. And that you seek to develop in our life your personality and that means that we would become ourselves loving. With that love would flow all the other characteristics – joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control. There are persons within this church body at this moment that even in this past week have failed at being a good lover. Failed to model you. We come Lord, asking your forgiveness and your help. We ask that you would search us and cleanse us. It's so easy for us to see the wrong in someone else. Help us to be cleansed from the wrong within us. Search our hearts, O God. Try us. Help us, truly help us Lord, to love. To love you, to love one another and to love ourselves. We ask this in your name. Amen.