

Introduction

Welcome to this Fruit of the Spirit creative arts retreat in daily life. A retreat in daily life is a period of time set aside for intentional spiritual growth in the midst of your regular routine. During this 9-week retreat, you will spend time contemplating the fruits of the Spirit (listed in Galatians 5) from a biblical perspective. This retreat is not specific to any liturgical season, nor does it correspond to any set of lectionary readings.

The retreat is designed for you to have individual retreat time each weekday, and a group experience once a week. You can, of course, adapt and use the material in any way you like. Not everyone will find time each day to engage the material. Not everyone will have a group with which to participate. For those who want to involve children in the retreat, I have provided suggestions and a child-friendly prayer at the end of each session.

Whatever your plans for using this material, I encourage you to enter into this retreat prayerfully. Set aside a time and a place that you can engage the retreat materials on a regular basis. For every session you will need your retreat book, Bible, art supplies, and table space.

I pray blessings for you as you experience this retreat in daily life. May the scripture readings and creative reflections allow you to live more deeply within the power of the Holy Spirit, and to more fully bear the fruits of the Spirit in all you do.

In Peace,
Joanna

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Online Support

- **A retreat blog page** on which I will post relevant links for each week, beginning September 15, 2012. These links are all supplemental to the retreat materials--not essential. While I will not post new links after November 17, 2012, the retreat page will remain available after that date. (Go to spaciousfaith.com.)
- **A Facebook group** for retreat participants. This group will allow for private sharing of artwork and insights from retreat participants. I am happy to keep the group open after November 17, though I will likely not post actively after that date.
- **A weekly chat via Facebook.** We will chat about your experiences with and insights from the retreat each Saturday from September 22-November 17. For those interested, specific arrangements for the chat will be made via email with those who order retreat materials before November 1, 2012.

Session Contents:

There is an introductory session based on the focus scripture: Galatians 5:13-26. This session includes an opening prayer, some thoughts on the scripture, a creative prayer activity, a closing prayer, and a blessing.

The materials for each of the nine weeks focus on a different fruit of the Spirit. For each week, the materials include:

- A "Thought for the Week" scripture, which you may choose to use as a memory verse for the week as well.
- A prayer and a blessing to use during your personal retreat times each day that week.
- A different scripture reading and reflection activity for each week day. Many of these reflections ask you to turn to a blank page; the blank pages are at the back of the retreat book.
- A Saturday/Group session that includes an opening prayer, scripture reading, thoughts on the scripture, creative prayer activity, sharing suggestions, a closing prayer, and a blessing. (Note that these prayers are written as responsive readings with the leader reading the plain text, the others reading the bold, and everyone reading the italics.)
- Suggestions on using the retreat material with children. This includes a prayer to use with children and ideas about which activities from the week would be most easily adapted for a multi-generational group.

*The weekday prayers are written for individual use (with "I") and the Saturday prayers are written for group use (with "we"), but these are easily adapted if you are doing a weekday session as a group or a Saturday session by yourself.

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Adapting for a Weekend Retreat

While it would be difficult to cover all nine fruits of the Spirit during a weekend retreat, there are many ways you could use this material in a weekend retreat context.

- You could begin a series on the Fruit of the Spirit with a weekend retreat. Each participant would be given a retreat book and encouraged to continue with the retreat in daily life after the weekend experience. Weekend sessions could include: Friday night: Opening Session; Saturday: some or all of the Monday-Friday sessions for week 1; Sunday: Saturday/Group session for week 1.
- You could conclude a period of retreat in daily life with a weekend retreat. Participants would be encouraged to use the retreat materials individually--possibly with group gatherings each week as well. At the end of the eighth week, the weekend retreat would include: Friday night: Saturday/Group session for Week 8; Saturday: some or all of the Monday-Friday sessions for week 9; Sunday: Saturday/Group session for week 9.
- You could create a stand-alone weekend retreat based on the Fruit of the Spirit. This retreat could include: Friday Night: Opening Session; Saturday: 3-5 of the Saturday/Group sessions; Sunday: Saturday/Group session for Week 9.

Opening Session

Prayer

Holy One,
Come with us on this journey
as we think and pray and write and draw
our way into a deeper understanding
of life in the Spirit.
We are open to receive
whatever you have to offer.
Amen.

Scripture: Galatians 5:13-26

Thoughts

As you go through these sessions on the fruits of the Spirit, keep in mind that you are merely tending the soil, planting the seeds, watering, and opening up to the light. The plants grow and blossom and flourish by the grace of God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control--these are not tasks on your checklist, but rather qualities that develop as you connect more deeply with God through Christ. When you notice that you are lacking in one or more of these qualities, it is not cause to berate yourself, but rather it is an invitation to open yourself up to a deeper life in the Spirit.

Creative Prayer Activity

- Take the silk cord out of the supply envelope in the back pocket.
- Tie nine knots on the cord--one for each fruit of the Spirit. As you tie each knot, pray for that fruit to grow within you.
- When you have tied all nine knots, you can leave this as a prayer cord, or tie it into a prayer bracelet.
- Consider keeping the cord with you throughout the coming weeks as a reminder that you live in the Spirit and that you desire to keep in step with the Spirit.

Closing Prayer

Hold the cord as you offer the upcoming retreat sessions to God in prayer.

If you are doing this session with a group, have each person pray for the group member on their right as you go around the circle.

Blessing

You are called to be free, so walk by the Spirit. Live into and out of the Spirit's abundant fruit! Live in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. As you live by the Spirit, may you keep in step with the Spirit as you walk in the way of Jesus. Amen. (From Galatians 5:13-25)

Week 1: Love

Thought for the Week

"Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs." ~Proverbs 10:12

Prayer

Holy Spirit, bear the fruit of love in my life.
Let me rest in your love for me.
Let me live out of my love for you.
Let my words and my actions bear witness to your love
in this beautiful, broken, beloved world.
Amen

Blessing

I pray that, according to the riches of God's glory, you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through the Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and grounded in love may have the power, with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:16-19)

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Monday

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37

Reflection

- On a blank page, write the greatest commandments around the edge as a frame: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself." Repeat the commandments as many times as you wish.
- Inside the frame, write the name of an individual or group of people that you want to show love to today. Draw a shape around that name or group.
- Repeat the above step until you have filled up the space or run out of people to write down.
- Color in the shapes if desired.

Pray for the people you have written down and pray that the Holy Spirit will enable you to show love to them today.

Tuesday

Scripture: I John 3:16-18

Reflection

- Let your body rest in a comfortable position. Breathe in deeply. Breathe out slowly.
- For at least 5 minutes, consider the depth of God's love for you as revealed in Jesus Christ. Let this love sink deeply into your spirit.
- Consider who God's love is calling you to love. What brothers and sisters are in need? (You might want to prayerfully look through a newspaper or magazine or go to a web site like Mennonite Central Committee--mcc.org--that has news of needs around the world.)
- How will you love with actions today? Write your commitment in the space below.

Wednesday

Scripture: Book of Ruth (If you don't have time to read the entire book, I commend to you the following passages: 1:1-16; 2:17-23; 3:1-5; 4:13-17)

Reflection: Whose love has supported you in times of transition? Is there someone who has sacrificed their own comfort to be with you in a time of need? Think of one person whose love has been particularly meaningful in your life.

- Get the thank you card and envelope out of the pocket in the back of the retreat book. Color in the design that is stamped on the card.
- As you color, offer prayers of thanks for this person who has loved you. If this person is still living, pray for him/her.
- Write a note of thanks on the back of the card and mail it--if appropriate.

Thursday

Scripture: Matthew 5:43-48

Reflection: Read this brief scripture prayerfully 3 or 4 times.

- On a blank page, draw a large heart with one of your watercolor pencils--taking up as much of the paper as possible.
- Get the patterned paper out of the back pocket. On this paper (the same piece or different pieces), write the names of individuals and/or groups that you consider your enemy. Who is persecuting you? Who is persecuting people that you love?
- Cut out each name and glue it into the heart you drew.
- Retrace the heart, applying the color heavily. Use a paintbrush and water to draw the color into the center of the heart and over the names.
- As you paint, pray for the people and groups you named, and pray that your love will grow to include all people.

Friday

Scripture: 1 Sam 18:1-4; 19:1-9; 20

Reflection: Friends are a gift from God. Think about the person you would consider your best friend.

- Draw a time line below and note the significant events in your friendship.
- Where has your love for each other been evident?
- Where has God's love been evident?
- Pray for your friend today--and talk to him/her in person or on the phone if possible.

Saturday/Group Session

Opening Prayer

God of Love,

We gather to consider your love for us

to consider our love for you

to recommit ourselves to love all of your people.

May we know your presence with us,

and may our time together

bear fruit for your Kingdom.

Amen.

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37

Thoughts

When Jesus asks the lawyer what is written in the law, the lawyer responds with words that would have been familiar to those gathered around Jesus; words familiar to us today: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

Love God. Love each other. That's the *law*. **Sometimes we don't like to think about the law being love.** When someone hurts us; when we read of atrocities committed against innocent people; when our spouse, our children, our co-workers, our friends are *not* cooperating . . . we want someone to lay down the law--not the love.

Sometimes we don't like to think about love being the law. We get the Hollywood version of love stuck in our heads; that version where love is the way you *feel* about someone--most likely someone very attractive. Or, if we move outside the romance genre, love is what you feel for the poor but noble mother, the orphaned child, the inspirational teacher. We think that loving people means that we must be, in the brilliant words of my friend Megan Ramer, "mushy-hearted love buckets."

But love is the law. It's something we *have* to do. All of the time. Whether we feel like it or not. And for those of us, like the lawyer in the text, who would like to find a loophole--there is none. Neighbor means everyone. And perhaps neighbor specifically means those people you most earnestly hope it doesn't mean.

Our blessing this week is from Ephesians 3. The English version of verse 17 most often reads "rooted and grounded" or "rooted and established" in love. I recently heard this passage in Spanish: "cementado en amor." *Cemented* in love. That's what it feels like sometimes. That's what it means for love to be law and not feeling. If we really want to follow Jesus, we are stuck with love. We are stuck with loving people we can love easily, and we are stuck with loving people that are hard for us to love.

And we are stuck being loved by God--loved in the intimacy of creation, loved through the incarnation in Jesus, loved with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Creative Prayer Activity

- Consider what it means to be "rooted and grounded" in God's law of love.
- Turn to a blank page. Draw a tree trunk with branches. Color in the tree as you prayerfully contemplate the law: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."
- Tear or cut roots out of brown paper. On each root, write the name of something or someone who helps to ground you in God's love. Glue the roots under the tree.
- Tear or cut leaves out of green paper. On each leaf, write the name of a person or group of people that you are called to love. Glue the leaves onto the tree branches.

Sharing

- Invite each person to share briefly about their roots. Then pray together a prayer of thanksgiving for God's love and for those people and things that help us experience that love.
- Invite each person to share briefly about their leaves. Then pray together for the wisdom and grace to obey the law of love.
- If you wish, group members can also share anything that was particularly meaningful for them from the retreat sessions of the previous week.

Closing Prayer

Holy Spirit, bear the fruit of love in our lives.

Let us rest in your love for us.

Let us live out of our love for you.

Let our words and our actions bear witness to your love
in this beautiful, broken, beloved world. Amen

Blessing

I pray that, according to the riches of God's glory, you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through the Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and grounded in love may have the power, with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:16-19)

***With Children**

This Saturday session would work well. The Veggie Tales version of the Good Samaritan story is on YouTube. For the art activity, you could make one tree as a group--possibly on a bigger piece of paper if available. Younger children can draw pictures and/or have someone older write for them.

Prayer:

Dear God,

You love us. We love you. We know you want us to love each other too.

Thank you for being with us as we learn more about your love. Amen.

Week 2: Joy

Thought for the Week

"Light shines on the righteous and joy on the upright in heart." ~ Psalm 97:11

Prayer

Holy Spirit, bear the fruit of joy in my life.
Open my eyes to the beauty around me,
To your presence surrounding me.
Even in the midst of disappointment and grief,
Let me rejoice in your promises of salvation
And rest in the joy of your grace. Amen.

Blessing

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in God, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

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Monday

Scripture: Luke 6:17-23

Reflection

- On a blank page, use black pen to write about the hardest, most painful aspect of your life right now.
- Use the colored pencils to draw around and/over the words you have written. As you add color, pray that God will guide you to a place of joy even in the midst of this difficult circumstance.
- If you want, use a wet paintbrush to spread the color out further around the page.

Tuesday

Scripture: Nehemiah 8:1-10

Reflection: Scripture is a precious gift from God!

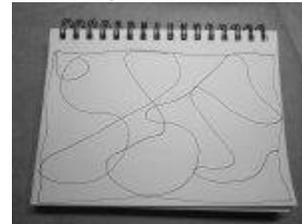
- Take the blank bookmark out of the supply envelope in the back pocket of your retreat book.
- On one side, write out the concluding words of this passage: "The joy of the Lord is your strength." (Nehemiah 8:10)
- On the other side, write out another Bible verse that gives you joy.
- Decorate the bookmark with colored pencils and other supplies as you wish, offering prayers of thanksgiving for the Word of God.
- And as a bonus, consider following Ezra's suggestion to enjoy choice food and sweet drinks today.

Wednesday:

Scripture: Psalm 126

Reflection: Create a prayer-doodle of gratitude.

- Turn to a blank page and use a black pen to draw a dot in each corner of your paper. Connect the dots with wavy lines to form a border.
- Next, draw a “string” inside your frame. Just make a random, curvy line that divides your framed area into several different sections.
- If some areas are too big and/or you think you will need more sections, add lines as desired.
- Write Psalm 126:3 (or another scripture about joy) in one of the sections: "The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy."
- In the remaining sections of your doodle, write words, names, and/or phrases that reflect some of the great things God has done for you and for those you love. What in your life brings you deepest joy? For what are you grateful?
- After you have written words in each section, begin coloring your prayer doodle one section at a time. You can color in an entire section, draw in a pattern, use multiple colors . . . anything you want.
- As you color each section, give thanks to God for what is written there.



Thursday

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Reflection: Lectio Divina

- **Read** through the scripture slowly--out loud if possible. Read the scripture through a second time, silently, and notice any words or phrases that stand out for you. Read through the scripture aloud one more time and allow one word or phrase to rest with you.
- **Meditate** on this word or phrase as you write it out repeatedly on a blank page. Use pen, pencil, or colored pencil--whatever medium helps you focus on the words from the text. Write the words as they feel to you--big or small, straight or curly or funky. Write the word or phrase as many times as you want--until you feel that you have basked in these words from God.
- **Pray** about your experience with these words. Tell God how you feel, what insights you have had, what you think God might be saying to you through this passage. You might wish to pray aloud, silently, or by writing on the back of your meditation page.
- **Contemplate** the joy it is to come to God through scripture. Remain open to any further word God may have for you.

Friday

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10

Reflection

- In each grid space below, represent the scene indicated from the story. You might be able to draw realistic scenes. Or you might draw rough sketches with stick figures. Or you might find magazine pictures to cut out or stickers to use or . . .
- As you depict each scene, imagine how you would feel if you were one of the women in the story.
- Consider: Where is the joy? What does that joy call you to do?

~Coming to the tomb	~The earthquake
~The angel appears	~The angel speaks
~Running from the tomb	~Meeting Jesus

Saturday/Group Session

Opening Prayer

God of Joy,

We thank you for the lives you have given us,
for the circumstances that have shaped us,
for the marvels that surround us.

Let us rejoice in the moment--

this time we have to listen and learn,
to think and pray and laugh together. Amen

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Thoughts

Our scriptures for this week reveal that joy is not dependent on external circumstances. Like the psalmist, we can find joy in a plentiful harvest and restored fortunes. And we can also find joy in the midst of persecution. As a fruit of the Spirit, joy is an internal quality that grows out of a faithful life.

Please do **not** hear me saying that people who suffer from depression--or who are simply not especially "bubbly"--are less faithful than peppier people. Rather, that joy, unlike happiness, is not dependent upon our personality or disposition or biochemical make up. Joy is something that exists for us when we open our eyes to the big picture.

There is joy because we have access to the Word of God in scripture. There is joy because God has been revealed to us in Christ who has enacted our salvation. There is joy because Jesus' resurrection is a reality.

It is not a joy in, of, or from ourselves. It is the joy of the Lord. And, as Ezra proclaims, this joy of the Lord is our strength! In Matthew's resurrection account, it is joy that propels the women from the tomb as witnesses to the world. And it is this same joy that will strengthen and propel us to bear witness to the life of God in the world.

Creative Prayer Activity

- Choose a brief passage of scripture about joy that has stuck with you this week. Perhaps it is the word or phrase you contemplated during your meditation on 1 Peter, or perhaps it is from a different passage.
- From the supply envelope in the back pocket of your book, take out one of the small cards in a clear sleeve and remove the piece of cardstock from the pouch.
- Write the scripture passage clearly on one side of the card.
- Using any of the art supplies you want--including papers, glue, and scissors if desired--decorate the card.
- Place the card back in the sleeve. Put it somewhere in your home or workplace where you will be likely to see it each day. Perhaps you can tape it on your bathroom mirror, refrigerator, or computer.

Sharing

- Invite each person to share briefly about the scripture they chose to put on their card. Why is this significant for them?
- If you wish, group members can also share anything that was particularly meaningful for them from the retreat sessions of the previous week.
- Hold hands for prayer. Go around the circle and have each person pray for the person on their right--especially that s/he would know the joy of Christ in the coming week.

Share these words of blessing with each other:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in God, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

***With Children**

The scripture readings and reflection activities for Tuesday, Wednesday, or Friday would be appropriate to use with children and relatively easy to adapt.

Prayer:

God of Joy,
 We know you are with us when we feel happy.
 We know you are with us when we feel sad.
 We can have your joy all the time
 as we follow your Son, Jesus.
 Amen.

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Week 3: Peace

Thought for the Week

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."~Matthew 5:9

Prayer

Holy Spirit, bear the fruit of peace in my life.
 I pray today for peace in the world . . .
 for peace in my community . . .
 for peace within myself.
 May the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,
 guard my heart and my mind in Christ Jesus.
 Amen.

Blessing

The LORD bless you and keep you;
 May God's face shine on you and be gracious to you;
 May the holy face turn toward you and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)

Monday

Scripture: Isaiah 2:1-5

Reflection

- Turn to a blank page. Using a watercolor pencil, draw a sword, gun, or other weapon.
- Look through a newspaper or magazine (or news web site). Using various colors of watercolor pencil, write violent words that you find. (For example: war, bloodshed, murder . . .) Write these words in different places around the page.
- Offer prayers for the people affected by these violent situations in the news.
- Write words from Isaiah 2:4-5 on top of the words of violence. As you write over a violent word, use the same watercolor pencil to write your words of peace: "God will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. . . . let us walk in the light of the Lord."
- Use a paintbrush and water to transform your sword and words into a watercolor painting. You might want to simply smear away the hard lines and create an abstract piece, or you may decide to make a simple object such as a flower or butterfly. Feel free to add more watercolor pencil as desired.
- As you paint, offer prayers of thanks for God's promises of peace. Pray for peacemakers around the world.

Tuesday

Scripture: Ephesians 2:11-22

Reflection

- Turn to a blank page and turn your book sideways.
- Draw a "dividing wall of hostility" in the middle of your page, dividing it in half. This wall can be simply a tall, skinny rectangle--about 1-2 inches thick.
- On the left side of the wall, draw yourself. (Stick figures are fine; you could glue on a photograph if you like.)
- On the right side of the wall, draw and/or write the names of people (individuals and groups) with whom you have a difficult relationship; perhaps people with whom you disagree about important issues.
- Inside the wall, name those things that cause the divisions and animosity.
- Pray for reconciliation between you and the people on the other side of your wall.
- Get the brown paper from the back pocket and cut out a cross. Your cross should be at least as wide as the wall.
- On the cross, write words from Ephesians 2:11-22 that speak to you most deeply.
- Glue the cross over the wall on your paper. Know that Christ is our peace.

Wednesday

Scripture: John 14:25-27

Reflection

- Get some patterned paper from the pocket. Cut or tear 10 or more pieces from the papers. (Each piece should be big enough to write on.)
- On the white side of each paper, write one thing that is troubling your heart.
- Hold these papers in your hand and speak aloud the words that Jesus gives to his followers: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." Speak these words as many times as you need to hear them.
- On a blank page, glue the papers patterned side up, creating any type of pattern or design you like. You can also add more paper or colored pencil to the page if desired.
- Say a prayer of thanks to God for the peace offered to us through Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thursday

Scripture: Psalm 34:8-14

Reflection: We have peace within ourselves when we trust in God's goodness and care. Our inner peace allows us to seek peace in the world.

- Take the paper with the dove drawn on out of the supply envelope in the back pocket. Cut out the dove if you want.
- Think about the ways you have experienced God's goodness in your life recently.
- For each "good thing" you think of, choose a watercolor pencil and apply color to the dove.
- When you are done applying color, use a paint brush and water to blend the colors until you like the look.
- Say a prayer of gratitude for the goodness of God in your life.
- When the dove is dry, you may want to write "Seek peace and pursue it" on your dove.
- Adhere the magnet (also in the supply envelope) to the back of the dove and hang it on your refrigerator or file cabinet as a reminder of God's goodness and our call to seek peace.

Friday

Scripture: Philippians 4:4-9

Reflection

- Find a small rock (or other object) that you can carry around in your pocket today.
- As you hold the rock in your hand, tell God about all of your worries. Ask God for those things you need from God.
- Sit in silence and know that "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."
- Ask God to give you an image of something that is true or noble or right or pure or lovely or admirable. It may be a scene, an object, a person--something you can see in your mind's eye. Write or draw this image below if you like.
- Say a prayer of gratitude for the peace of God, and for the excellent and praiseworthy things in your life.
- Keep the rock with you today. When you feel yourself becoming anxious, hold onto your rock and think of the image God gave you.

Saturday/Group Session

Opening Prayer

God of peace,
May we know your Spirit's presence with us today
as we listen and think and pray
as we try to live within your peace
as we try to live out your peace
in the midst of a violent world.
Keep us in perfect peace, O God,
because we trust in you. Amen
(With words from Isaiah 26:3)

Scripture: John 14:25-27

Thoughts

In the past, whenever I have thought about peace as a fruit of the Spirit, I thought about being calm, having low stress. If we are living by the Spirit, we will be peaceful inside ourselves.

And I still think this is true--for the most part. I mean, there are people with anxiety disorders, and the disorder does not make them less spiritual. And there are times when living by the Spirit leads you to act in counter-cultural ways and so causes more external stress in your life. In general, though, feeling at peace is a fruit of a God-focused life.

Yet when you look to see what the Scriptures say about peace, you quickly realized that God is concerned with much more than you feeling peaceful inside. God is concerned about you being at peace with people in your community--particularly within the church. And God is concerned with peace between nations.

I would argue that all of these levels of peace are fruit of the Spirit; that the Spirit bears fruit beyond our individual lives. And the Spirit bears fruit within our individual lives so that we can be empowered to work with the Spirit in bearing fruit in our communities and in our world.

Creative Prayer Activity

- Turn to a blank page and draw a line down the middle, creating two columns.
- Write "World's Peace" at the top of one column. In that column, list the ways that the world gives peace. What type of peace does the world promise? How do we try to attain this worldly peace? (You may want to draw symbols or cut pictures out of magazines instead of writing words.)
- At the top of the other column, write "Peace of Christ." Jesus says that he does not give peace in the way the world gives peace. In this column, list the ways that we experience the peace of Christ. What type of peace is this? How do we attain this peace? (Again, you may prefer to create a visual representation rather than writing words.)
- Use the red pencil to circle one or two aspects of worldly peace that you would like to avoid.
- Use a yellow pencil to circle one or two aspects of the peace of Christ of which you would like to be more aware.

Sharing

- Invite each person to share briefly about their lists.
- After each person shares, the group can lay hands on that person and pray that s/he will experience the true peace of Christ in the coming week.
- If you wish, group members can also share anything that was particularly meaningful for them from the retreat sessions of the previous week.

Closing Prayer

Holy Spirit, bear the fruit of peace in our lives.
We pray today for peace in the world . . .
for peace in our communities . . .
for peace within ourselves.
May the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,
guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.

Blessing

The LORD bless you and keep you;
May God's face shine on you and be gracious to you;
May the holy face turn toward you and give you peace.
(Numbers 6:24-26)

***With Children**

The sessions for Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday could be easily adapted to use with children.

Prayer

Holy Spirit,
May we live in your peace.
We pray for peace in our hearts . . .
for peace with our friends . . .
for peace in our family . . .
for peace in our world.
Thank you for giving us the peace of Christ.
Amen.

Week 4: Patience

Thought for the Week: "Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly." ~Proverbs 14:29

Prayer

Holy Spirit,
Bear the fruit of patience in my life.
May I walk through struggles with grace.
May I continue in love and forgiveness toward all.
May I faithfully await the fulfillment
of your Kingdom reality on earth as it is in Heaven.
Amen.

Blessing

May God fill you with the knowledge of the Divine will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives. May you be strengthened with all power according to God's glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience. Amen. (Adapted from Colossians 1:9-14)

* * * * *

Monday

Scripture: Job 2:11-13 (You can read through more of the book of Job if you have time.)

Reflection: We often talk about the patience of Job--how Job refused to curse God even in the midst of extreme hardship. I am also impressed by the patience of Job's friends. They sat with him in silence for seven days and seven nights.

- Set a timer for 7 minutes. Simply sit and wait in silence for the timer to go off. (If you regularly participate in contemplative practices, you might want to have a long period of silence.)
- In the space below, write just a few words or phrases about your experience of waiting. How does it feel to be patient?

Tuesday

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

Reflection: The Greek term used in Galatians 5 for "patience" contains this sense of forbearance in suffering.

- On a blank page, use watercolor pencils to write words and phrases that represent various struggles that you have faced throughout your life.
- Say prayers of thanksgiving for those struggles you have made it through.
- Ask for patience from the Holy Spirit in those struggles that continue today.
- Use a paintbrush and water to gently blend the colors of the words together as you offer your prayers to God.

Wednesday

Scripture: Matthew 18:23-35

Reflection: We are called to be patient with other people, as God is patient with us.

- Take the 3"x 5" piece of card stock out of the back pocket of your book.
- On one side of the card, write "Forgiven" in bold letters.
- On that same side, in smaller letters, write some of the things you have done that have caused God--and other people--to exercise patience. For what have you been forgiven?
- On the other side of the card, write "Forgiving" in bold letters.
- In smaller letters, write some of the things others have done that you have needed--or still need--patience to deal with. What have you forgiven others?
- Pray over this card. Thank God for the forgiveness you have received. Pray for the patience to offer the forgiveness that you need to give.

Thursday

Scripture: Psalm 37:1-9

Reflection

- On a blank page, list the imperatives from this psalm: Do not fret; trust in the Lord; take delight in the Lord; commit your way to the Lord; be still before the Lord; refrain from anger.
- Write your list slowly and prayerfully. When you are done writing the list, read Psalm 37:1-9 again.
- Go back to your list and circle the instruction that most deeply speaks to you today.
- Pray that, by God's grace, you will be able to live by these words.
- You can write out your prayer or other reflections if you wish.

Friday

Scripture: James 5:7-11

Reflection: The writer of James uses the metaphor of a farmer waiting for crops to show how we should be patient as we wait for the Lord.

- In the space below, brainstorm other metaphors that we could use to show patience.
- Take out one of the larger cards in a clear sleeve from the back pocket.
- On one side of this card, illustrate one of the metaphors for patience--either the metaphor from the Bible or one you have written.
- On the other side of the card, write a brief prayer using this metaphor. (i.e., "God, as the farmer is patient for the crops to grow, help me be patient.")
- Hang this card in a visible place or keep it with you as a reminder of patience.

Saturday/Group Session

Opening Prayer

O Patient and Everlasting God,

Let us be fully present with each other here.

May your Spirit sustain us in patience:

Patience in uncertainty,

Patience through trials,

Patience with others,

Patience, even, with our own falterings and failings. Amen

Scripture: Psalm 37:1-9

Thoughts

These days, we most often think of patience as waiting for something without too much fuss. We tell our children, "Supper will be ready in half an hour; just be patient." We try to be patient through the red light that lasts forever. We endure the routine of work and chores as we wait "patiently" for our vacation.

Certainly it is a good thing to wait without fuss--especially when fussing would not do anything except increase our stress and annoy those around us. Still, the biblical concept of *patience* goes far beyond this idea of waiting patiently.

Patience has to do with waiting on the boat for 40 days and 40 nights, with wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, with anticipating the Messiah for generations.

Patience has to do with forgiving someone 70 x 7 times, with keeping no record of wrongs, with enduring hardship for the sake of the Gospel, with trusting that God's resurrection life is the reality even when all we see is death.

Creative Prayer Activity

- Have 2 or 3 different people read through Psalm 37:1-9 out loud.
- During each reading, listeners should write down words or phrases from the reading that resonate with them. Use a blank page in your book, and write in different colors if you wish.
- After the readings, spend time in silence decorating your word page and praying over the words God has given you.

Sharing

- Invite each person to share briefly about her/his word picture.
- If you wish, group members can also share anything that was particularly meaningful for them from the retreat sessions of the previous week.

Closing Prayer

Holy Spirit,
Bear the fruit of patience in our lives.
May we walk through struggles with grace.
May we continue in love and forgiveness toward all.
*May we faithfully await the fulfillment
of your Kingdom reality on earth as it is in Heaven. Amen.*

Blessing

May God fill you with the knowledge of the Divine will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives. May you be strengthened with all power according to God's glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience. Amen. (Adapted from Colossians 1:9-14)

***With Children**

The sessions for Monday, Tuesday, and Friday could be adapted for children. (For Friday's session, note that, developmentally, most children do not understand metaphor until about age 7.)

Prayer

Dear God,
Help us to be patient--
Patient when life is hard,
Patient with our family and friends,
Patient with ourselves.
Thank you that you always love us and are patient with us. Amen.

* * * * *

Week 5: Kindness

Thought for the Week: "What is desirable in a person is kindness, and it is better to be poor than a liar."~Proverbs 19:22

Prayer

Holy Spirit, bear the fruit of kindness in my life.
May I speak in kindness and act in kindness.
May even the thoughts of my heart
reflect your Divine loving kindness,
for it is in You that I live and move and have my being.
Amen.

Blessing

Go forth knowing that God loves you with an everlasting love;
God draws you with unfailing kindness. (Jeremiah 31:3)

Monday

Scripture: Hosea 11:1-4

Reflection: I love this image of God as kind and loving parent. The kindness we share in the world flows from the deep *hesed*--the loving kindness--of God.

- Turn to a blank page. Draw yourself (a stick figure is fine) in the middle of the page.
- Draw lines coming from you to the edges of the paper. These are the cords of kindness that sustain you.
- Label some or all of the cords if you wish. What acts of kindness--large or small--have sustained you in the past? What kindnesses hold you today?
- Say a prayer of thanks for the kindness you experience, and ask God to lead you to speak and act in kindness today.

Tuesday

Scripture: Acts 28:1-2, 7-10

Reflection

- Think about a time that you were a stranger--a time when you entered into a place you had never been with people you had never met.
- In the space below, write words or phrases that describe how it felt to be a stranger.
- Now think about people that you might see this week who are strangers in "your" space.
- In the space below, write down things you could do to be kind to strangers.
- Circle one thing you will commit to doing this week and pray for God's grace and guidance in your endeavors.

Wednesday

Scripture: Ephesians 4:29-32

Reflection: Kind words build others up; they benefit those who listen.

- Turn to a blank page.
- Write kind words and phrases in different colors all over the page.
- Add more colors and shapes to the page as you wish.
- Pray that these words will be in your heart and on your lips today.

Thursday

Scripture: Genesis 18:1-10; Hebrews 13:2

Reflection: Hospitality is one way that we are called to show kindness.

- Take a large card in a plastic sleeve out of the back pocket.
- On one side of the card, write the word "welcome"--or perhaps "welcome, friend." Decorate this side of the card however you would like.
- On the other side of the card, write a brief prayer that you would offer for any guests that might stay in your home.
- Place this card in a guest room or by the couch--wherever a guest might sleep. (If there is no space for overnight guests in your home, place the card in any space that might host visitors.)
- Pray for those who live in your home and for those who have visited and will visit.
- As a bonus activity, clean your guest room or put a fresh centerpiece on your table as a way of preparing to welcome guests.

Friday

Scripture: Mark 14:3-9

Reflection: Kindness is not a warm fuzzy feeling. Kindness is concrete. Fill in the chart below with single words or short phrases. First impressions are good here.

In this scripture	In my life
Kindness looks like:	Kindness looks like:
Kindness sounds like:	Kindness sounds like:
Kindness smells like:	Kindness smells like:
Kindness feels like:	Kindness feels like:
Kindness tastes like:	Kindness tastes like:

*Pray that today you will be aware of the kindness around you and that you will extend kindness to others.

Saturday/Group Session

Prayer

God of kindness,
May the words of our mouths
and the meditations of our hearts
be pleasing in your sight.
Amen

Scripture: Mark 14:3-9

Thoughts

In this story we witness two acts of kindness. First, the woman extends kindness to Jesus by bestowing on him a lavish gift. Then, Jesus shows kindness to the woman by accepting and praising her gift. If we truly want to live the fruit of kindness, we must both give and receive it with grace.

Jesus line here--"The poor you will always have with you."--may not seem kind on the surface. But anyone who reads the Gospel story will know that Jesus is very kind and compassionate to the poor. His intent is not to say that we shouldn't give money to the poor, but to affirm the woman's actual act of kindness over the theoretical kindness of the disciples.

If we keep our eyes open, we can quickly become overwhelmed by the needs that surround us. As individuals and as churches we can spend so much time talking about what we *should* do that we don't actually do anything.

Strategic actions to alleviate hunger, to promote justice, to help the environment--these are good. And in the midst of the big pictures, we should not lose sight of the people standing right in front of us who may need a simple gesture of kindness in the moment.

Creative Prayer Activity

- Think of someone you know who could use some kind words.
- Get the blank card and envelope out of the back pocket. Decorate the front of the card using any art supplies you like.
- Write a kind note inside the card.
- Mail the card! Or hand deliver it. (Not in the middle of your group session, but some time soon.)

Sharing

- Invite each person to share briefly about the card s/he made.
- Pray as a group for the card recipients.
- Have each person share one kind deed they did this past week and one kindness that was done to them.
- If you wish, group members can also share anything that was particularly meaningful for them from the retreat sessions of the previous week.

Closing Prayer

Holy Spirit, bear the fruit of kindness in our lives.
May we speak in kindness and act in kindness.
May even the thoughts of our hearts
reflect your Divine loving kindness,
for it is in You that we live and move and have our being.
Amen.

Blessing

Go forth knowing that God loves you with an everlasting love;
God draws you with unfailing kindness. (Jeremiah 31:3)

***With Children**

Any of this week's activities could be adapted fairly easily for use with children. The activities for Wednesday and Saturday would work without much adaptation at all. The suggestions for Thursday would make a good family project.

Prayer

Dear God,
Thank you for your kindness to us.
Help us to speak kind words.
Help us to do kind things.
May the people around us know your kindness
through our kindness.
Amen

* * * * *

Week 6: Goodness

Thought for the Week: For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. (2 Peter 2:15)

Prayer

Holy Spirit,
Bear the fruit of goodness in my life.
I know I am a part of your good creation,
your handiwork,
created in Christ to do good works.
May I strive to *be* good and to *do* good
as I resist the temptation to merely *look* good.
Amen (based on Ephesians 2:10)

Blessing

May God make you worthy of the Divine calling, that by holy power God may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. May the name of our Lord Jesus be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.
(2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

Monday

Scripture: Genesis 1

Reflection: The goodness to which we are called is inherent in creation.

- Take this book and your colored pencils to a comfortable place outside. If the weather makes it uncomfortable anywhere outside, find a nice spot by a window.
- Turn to a blank page and draw what you see. Maybe a detail of one beautiful thing. Maybe a panorama. Any part of God's creation that catches your eye. (The point here is not for you to draw a perfect picture, but for you to pay attention.)
- Somewhere on your picture, write these words from Genesis 1:31: ". . . and it was very good."
- Consider that you are a part of God's good creation. And in all of your creative efforts (efforts that go far beyond "creative art" activities), you reflect the goodness of your Creator.
- Say a prayer of thanksgiving for the goodness of creation.

Tuesday

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25

Reflection: The good in a particular situation may be difficult to determine. It is important that we are grounded in faith and open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

- What qualities does Joseph exhibit in this story that you would consider good?
- Who do you know that consistently bears the fruit of goodness in her or his life?
- Use the space below to write a bit about this person. If you are in the mood for something creative, try writing a poem.

Wednesday

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:3-9

Reflection: As we consider how to live out the fruit of the Spirit, it is important to remember that God's "divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life." We are not dependent upon our own goodness, but are called to live out of the goodness of God.

- Turn to a blank page and get out your colored pencils!
- Begin in the center of the page and write these words in a spiral going outward: faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, love.
- Consider the interconnectedness of these virtues. If you have room on the page, continue the outward spiral, writing the words in reverse order.
- Pray that you will more faithfully live out the goodness of God.

Thursday

Scripture: 1 Samuel 25: 2-35

Reflection: Part of the meaning of the Greek word translated in Galatians as "goodness" has to do with generosity. Generosity is one of the striking qualities of Abigail as she brings a great deal of food and wine to David and his men. Maybe you do not have sheep or raisin cakes to share, but you have something.

- Turn to a blank page.
- Draw pictures (or simply shapes) indicating things that you have that you could share. Consider material items as well as time and skills.
- Pray that you will have a generous heart and opportunities to share with others.

Friday

Scripture: Luke 6:6-11

Reflection: Goodness does not always mean following the rules. And the good choice may be an unpopular choice.

- Turn to a blank page.
- Re-write this biblical story from the perspective of the man with the withered hand. You might consider the following questions:
 - What did he believe about Sabbath observance?
 - How did he feel when Jesus asked him to stand in front of everyone?
 - What did he think of Jesus?
- Pray for the wisdom to discern between good and evil. Pray for the courage to choose the good, even when it is unpopular.

Saturday/Group Session

Opening Prayer

Good and Holy God,

Open our eyes to the goodness of your creation.

Open our hearts to the goodness within other people.

Open our minds to the truth of your Word,

that we might know the good from the evil.

And grant us your strength,

that we might live out your goodness in the world.

Amen.

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:3-9

Thoughts

Goodness seems a rather all-encompassing, possibly overwhelming, virtue. But the point of goodness is not to do good things all the time. The fruit of goodness, as the writer of 2 Peter suggests, is about our participation in the divine life; about dwelling in and living out of the goodness of God. This goodness is rooted deep within us and extends far beyond us.

It is difficult to understand goodness in the abstract. "Good" is often contrasted with "evil," but evil is equally abstract. That's why our readings this week have included many stories--stories where we see what goodness looks like. Goodness is beautiful and creative. It is generous and humble. It is provocative and disobedient. Ultimately, goodness is life-giving rather than life-stealing. As Jesus indicates, "the good" is that which saves life.

Creative Prayer Activity

- Discuss (or think and write on your own about) the various aspects of goodness revealed in this week's scripture readings: stories of creation, Joseph, Abigail, and Jesus. Also consider qualities of the person you wrote about on Tuesday.
- From these various aspects of goodness, choose 4-6 that are particularly compelling for you. They may be traits you exhibit, traits you want to develop, traits you most appreciate in others . . .
- Using the colored card stock and/or patterned paper, cut out a shape to correspond to each aspect of goodness you have chosen. These shapes might be abstract, they might represent the trait in some way, or they might be components for a simple scene. Write each aspect of goodness on its corresponding shape.
- Turn to a blank page. If desired, use watercolor pencils to create a background on the paper.
- Write "goodness" somewhere on the page.
- Glue on the shapes you have made to create a collage. Add other drawings and paper cutouts if desired.
- As you create the collage, thank God that you can dwell in the Divine goodness and ask God to help you more fully live out that goodness in the world.

Sharing

- Invite each person to share their collage.
- If you wish, group members can also share anything that was particularly meaningful for them from the retreat sessions of the previous week. (Much of this will likely have been shared in the earlier discussion.)

Closing Prayer

Holy Spirit,

Bear the fruit of goodness in our lives.

We know we are a part of your good creation,

your handiwork--created in Christ to do good works.

May we strive to *be* good and to *do* good

as we resist the temptation to merely *look* good.

Amen

Blessing

May God make you worthy of the Divine calling, that by holy power God may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. May the name of our Lord Jesus be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

***With Children**

Creative activities from Monday and Thursday could be easily adapted for children. They might also have a good time talking together about the material for Friday's session-- maybe even writing a brief monologue for the man with the withered hand.

Prayer

Dear God,

We know that you are good,

and we know you want us to live out your goodness.

Help us to make choices that give life

to ourselves and to others.

Help us walk in the good path of Jesus.

Amen.

Week 7: Faithfulness

Thought for the Week: "I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I have set my heart on your laws." ~Psalm 119:30

Prayer

Holy Spirit,
Bear the fruit of faithfulness in my life.
I want to follow where you lead,
 even when I don't understand where we are going.
I want to live by your law of love, no matter what the earthly consequences.
I want to offer myself fully to you--all of my strength and all of my weakness.
Bless me with your guidance, protection, and healing
on this great adventure of faithfulness.
Amen.

Blessing

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your life in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:6-7)

* * * * *

Monday

Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-19

Reflection: Write your own litany of faith.

- Turn to page 33.
- Think of 5 people you know (or have known) that you would consider people of great faith.
- Write one of the five names after each "By faith," so that all names are listed. Add your name after the bottom "By faith." (Feel free to use colored pencils if you want.)
- Finish each of the six sentences by briefly describing one way that faith was/is evident in each person's life.
- For yourself, you can choose to write in past, present, or future tense. Maybe there is something you are expecting to happen by faith in your life.
- Thank God for faithful people in your life and pray that you will be faithful as well.

By faith

By faith

By faith

By faith

By faith

By faith

Tuesday

Scripture: Genesis 12:1-5

Reflection: The story of Abraham and Sarah is a core story of scripture. It is a story of human faith and human failing. And, most importantly, it is a story of God's faithfulness.

- Turn to a blank page and get out your watercolor pencils.
- Use a brown pencil to draw a fairly large blob shape in the middle of the page. (We're drawing an island, so the brown shape will be the shape of your island.)
- Shade/scribble inside the island with one or more shades of brown. Use a wet paintbrush to then paint the land brown.
- The area outside of your island is the ocean. Use various shades of blue (and other colors if you like) to draw waves in the ocean. Draw these wave lines fairly dark. Then use a wet paintbrush to paint in the ocean.
- Once the island has dried, draw any features on it that you would like: mountains, lakes, rivers, trees, forests, beaches. You might want to add houses--or not. Just have fun.
- Somewhere on your picture, write the words of God to Abram: "Go . . . to the land I will show you."
- Spend some time in prayer listening to God. What land is God showing you? If God is showing you a land, what step(s) do you need to take to get there?
- You can write any insights from your prayer time in the space below.

Wednesday

Scripture: Hebrews 11:20-40

Reflection: The Scriptures are full of stories of faithful people. In some cases, their faithfulness is rewarded in this life. In other cases, the faithful die still clinging to promises not yet realized. This is the case for the modern day faithful as well.

- In the space below, write the names of people or groups who are seeking to be faithful in the midst of struggle. These might be people and groups you know personally and/or those you have heard or read about.
- You will create a prayer stick for these people. Hold them in your heart as you go outside and choose a medium-sized stick.
- Bring the stick inside and get out the yarn.
- Choose one color of yarn to represent the first person or group you have written down. Tie the yarn onto one end of the stick and wrap the yarn around the stick repeatedly, covering a portion of the stick. As you wrap, pray for the person or group.
- Repeat the above step for each person or group on your list.
- Keep your prayer stick somewhere where it will serve as a reminder for you to pray in the coming week and beyond.

Thursday

Scripture: Daniel 3:8-28

Reflection

- Get out some patterned and/or colored paper and tear or cut it into several shapes (roughly 2 inches squared).
- On each shape, write an expectation you face that is counter to your life of faith. These expectations might be specific to you (i.e. the expectation of your boss that you will work longer hours) or broader societal expectations.(i.e. the expectation that women will spend a lot of time and money on their appearance).
- Turn to a blank page.
- Create a collage with your shapes.
- Cut flames out of the tissue paper and glue the flames over the top of your collage. These flames can represent the forces hostile to faith. And the flames also represent God's refining fire that strengthens your faith in the midst of trial.
- Say a prayer of thanks to God for the faith you have. If there are one or two particular expectations that you are struggling against, offer those struggles to God in prayer.

Friday

Scripture: Mark 5:21-43

Reflection: These two interwoven stories are about reaching out to Jesus for healing. Both Jarius and the woman reach out in faith--and also from desperation.

- Turn to a blank page.
- Place a hand in the middle of the page and, using a pen or colored pencil, trace around it.
- Inside the hand, write about the healing that you seek. Perhaps, like Jarius, you seek healing for someone you love. Or perhaps, like the woman, you seek it for yourself. You may choose to write a simple word or phrase, or you may want to write a paragraph or two about your pain, your faith, and your desire for healing.
- Choose one of Jesus' responses:
 - To the woman: "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."
 - To Jarius: "Don't be afraid; just believe."
- Write this response around the outline of your hand, repeating it as many times as you like--you can fill up the page if you want.
- Place your hand inside the hand outline. Offer your longings to Jesus in prayer. Rest in his words of comfort.

Saturday/Group Session

Opening Prayer

Faithful God,

Our gathering today is part of our efforts,
feeble though they may be, to reach toward you in faith.

**As we offer our time, our attention, and our words to you today,
we trust in the assurance of Jesus--**

that even faith the size of a mustard seed is enough.

Enough for us. Enough for you.

Amen.

Scripture: Mark 5:21-43

Thoughts

The Gospels are full of stories about Jesus healing people, and often Jesus relates these healings to faith. Just in the book of Matthew we see: the Centurion is commended for his faith (8:10); the paralyzed man is healed and forgiven on the merits of *his friends'* faith (9:2); two blind men are healed because of their faith (9:29); and Jesus is so impressed with the faith of the Canaanite woman that he heals her daughter (15:28). This connection between faith and healing can feel uncomfortable in our era of advanced medicine and con-artist "faith healers."

What about the people who have faith and are not healed? What about the faithless that lead a charmed life? How can we live in faith *and* make wise choices regarding our health and finances?

I don't have the answers to these questions. But I have some thoughts about what it means to come to God in faith:

- I think that moving toward Jesus--however circuitously or slowly--is a sign that our faith is at least as large as a mustard seed.
- I think that during those times when we are unable or unwilling to move toward Jesus, we can be carried by the faith of our friends.
- I think the prayer of the possessed boy's father is a faithful prayer: "Help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

And I think that part of being faithful is being willing to live with the questions as we seek to deepen our relationship with the one who is ever-faithful.

Creative Prayer Activity

- As a group, list all of the characters in Mark 5:21-43.
- Prayerfully consider which of the characters you most identify with, and why.
- On a blank page, create a portrait of your character. It can be realistic, a stick figure, an abstract work . . . if magazines are available, you could even look for a picture of someone that makes you think of your character from the story.
- On the back of the portrait, write out a brief dialog between you and the character. (If you need a place to start, consider asking the character a question such as "Why did you ____?" or "How did you feel when ____?".)

Sharing

- Invite each person to share their portrait and/or dialog if they wish.
- Group members can also share anything that was particularly meaningful for them from the retreat sessions of the previous week.

Closing Prayer

Holy Spirit,

Bear the fruit of faithfulness in our lives.

We want to follow where you lead,

even when we don't understand where we are going.

We want to live by your law of love,

no matter what the earthly consequences.

We want to offer ourselves fully to you--

all of our strengths and all of our weaknesses.

*Bless us with your guidance, protection, and healing
on this great adventure of faithfulness.*

Amen.

Blessing: Share this week's blessing with each other. Go around the circle and have each group member bless the member on her/his right. Begin the blessing with the person's name.

[Name], just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your life in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:6-7)

***With Children**

This week's material is probably the most difficult to adapt for use with children. Here are a couple of suggestions:

1. Use Tuesday's scripture and drawing activity--possibly draw an island on a large piece of paper and allow children to color it and add features. Then talk about how scary it is to leave behind what you know and travel somewhere new. Even though Abraham and Sarah were scared, they did this anyway because they trusted God's promises.
2. Use the scripture for Thursday. Cut out three people and one angel (basic shapes from paper or pictures from a magazine). Glue these figures onto a piece of paper. Then cut out tissue paper flames and glue them over the figures. Cut out three more people. On the back or on another piece of paper, make a picture with these people showing how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the furnace unharmed.

Prayer

God, you are faithful to us:
You always love us and you are always with us.
We want to be faithful to you as we follow Jesus' way of love. Amen.

* * * * *

Week 8: Gentleness

Thought for the Week

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." ~Proverbs 15:1

Prayer

Holy Spirit,
Bear the fruit of gentleness in my life.
May the words of my voice,
the movements of my hands,
the leanings of my heart,
reflect your gentle, present, persistent love. Amen.

Blessing

Hear these words of Jesus for you: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul."
(Matthew 11:29)

Monday

Scripture: 1 Kings 19:9-13

Reflection: Gentleness is a key--and surprising--characteristic of God. This creative exercise is something I call visual lectio divina.

- Read the scripture passage out loud. Listen for the words or phrases that grab your attention. In the space below, write down the most compelling words and phrases from the passage.
- Read through the scripture passage silently. This time consider what colors come to mind as you read. There may be colors associated with actual objects in the passage or colors that reflect a general mood of the scripture. Get out the colored pencils that are the colors you associate with the passage.
- Read the scripture passage one more time, silently or out loud. This time, think about the shapes that the passage invokes. These might be shapes of specific objects, but not necessarily. Write down the shape(s) suggested by the scripture.
- Open to a blank page. Use a black pen or marker to write the words you chose on your blank page. You might want to write each word more than once. Write them as large or small as you like, in whatever positions feel right.
- Now use the colors you have selected to draw the shapes you wrote about. Draw over and/or around the words. As you color, give thanks for God's gentleness.
- If you used a black pen or marker that won't run when it gets wet, you can use a wet paintbrush to spread out the watercolor pencil colors.

Tuesday

Scripture: Matthew 19:13-15

Reflection: Part of gentleness involves paying loving attention to those who are often ignored.

- In the space below, write the names of individuals and/or types of people that are often ignored or pushed aside--like the children in this scripture. Write slowly and pray for each person or group that you list.
- Get a 3 X 5 card out of the back pocket. On the card, write a blessing for one of the individuals or groups you have listed.
- Use your colored pencils to decorate the border of the card.
- If appropriate, mail or give the blessing to the person/people for whom it is written. If this is not appropriate, keep the card with your Bible and pray this blessing each day this week.

Wednesday

Scripture: Genesis 26:12-33

Reflection: Gentleness does not require us to allow ourselves to be abused. Yet there is an aspect of gentleness that prevents us from always demanding our own way. Sometimes being gentle even means that we are willing give up our rights to avoid violence. (Think about Jesus' teachings of turning the other cheek and walking the extra mile.) In this text, Isaac was able to act with gentleness because he trusted that God would provide enough water for him wherever he went.

- Turn to a blank page. On the top half of the page, write about a time when you were not as gentle with someone as you wish you had been.
- Now write about what fears and/or threats prevented you from being gentle. (Did you fear you would loose an argument? Was your physical safety threatened? . . .)
- On the bottom half of the paper, draw a simple well. Do not color in the well. Even a basic rectangle is fine. Add other elements, such as grass and trees, to the picture if you like.
- Inside the well, write what you need for God to provide so that you will be able to be more gentle during a similar situation in the future.
- Offer a prayer of thanks that God provides for all of our needs. Pray for the eyes to see and to know that God's abundant provision surrounds you.

Thursday

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:13-17

Reflection: Speaking gently to those who disagree with us is a difficult practice--and something we do not see modeled much in the broader culture.

- Turn to a blank page.
- In the middle of the page, draw a heart and write "Christ as Lord." ("In your hearts revere Christ as Lord.")
- Somewhere else on the page, write "Do not fear." Draw any shape you like around the words, and then draw a line connecting this shape with the center heart.
- Near the "Do not fear" bubble, write, separately, any fears that are oppressing you right now. Draw a shape around each of these fears, then draw lines connecting them to the "Do not fear" bubble.
- Repeat the above process with other phrases from this passage. Here are some suggestions, but you might choose others: "You are blessed;" "Be prepared to give an answer;" Hope; "those who speak maliciously;" Gentleness; God's will.
- After you have drawn your bubbles and lines, spend time in prayer as you are led while you color in your shapes.

Friday

Scripture: John 19:38-42

Reflection: This story of Jesus' burial reminds us of the gentleness of Jesus as he faced his trials and his execution. This story also shows Joseph and Nicodemus engaged in the very gentle, intimate act of wrapping Jesus' body for burial.

- Take out the small baggie with two toothpick pieces and the string.
- Hold the toothpick pieces together to form a cross.
- Use the string to hold the pieces together by wrapping repeatedly around the intersection in an X pattern.
- Once the pieces are securely in place, take the string to the bottom of the vertical piece and then wrap the string around the piece from the bottom up--wrapping around both the toothpick and the part of the string you brought to the bottom.
- When you get up to the intersection, take the string out to the end of one of the vertical pieces and wrap from the edge to the center. Then repeat for the other side.
- Finally, wrap the top vertical segment from the intersection to the top. Then wrap down again part way and tie it off.
- If you would like to hang or wear your cross, you can tie a loop onto the top as well.
- As you wrap the string, meditate on the gentleness of Jesus and think of your own, everyday acts of gentleness.

Saturday/Group Session

Opening Prayer

Holy and Gentle God,

We gather under the shadow of your mothering wing.

Hold us, for now, within your gentle embrace,

And go with us into the world,

Guiding our hands and our hearts

In your way of gentleness. Amen.

Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30

Thoughts

Our theology--how we think about God--deeply affects how we live in this world. Understanding God's gentleness can help us to be more gentle with ourselves, which can help us be more gentle with others.

Jesus says to his followers: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. . . . For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Notice that Jesus does not say here that we will break every yoke and lay down all of our burdens. There is a yoke. There are burdens. We cannot get rid of them, but we can exchange our burdens for the burdens of Jesus.

This really is a rather odd thing for Jesus to say: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." Based on the Gospel stories, Jesus actually carried a very heavy burden; walked under a painful yoke. The ease of the yoke, the lightness of the burden, is not about the external circumstances. It is about the gentleness of the One who to whom we are yoked, the gentleness of the One who helps to carry the burden.

The ease of the yoke, the lightness of the burden, is even about the gentleness of the ones with whom we are yoked in the church, the gentleness of the ones who help us carry our burdens. The fruit of gentleness is not just for our own comfort; it is also for the building up of the body of Christ.

Creative Prayer Activity

- Take out a piece of brown paper and cut it into a yoke shape.
- Take a moment to pray and think about the things in your life that feel like heavy burdens. What is making you weary?
- Using light-colored pencils, write your burdens on the yoke.
- Now turn the yoke over. Take some time to think and pray about the yoke that Jesus offers. What makes it easy and light? How does he offer rest?
- On the blank side of the yoke, write words that describe the yoke of Jesus.

Sharing

- Invite all participants to share about their yokes as they are comfortable.
- Pray together that the Holy Spirit will empower you to set down your burdens and fasten on the yoke of Christ.
- If you wish, group members can also share anything that was particularly meaningful for them from the retreat sessions of the previous week.

Closing Prayer

Holy Spirit,
Bear the fruit of gentleness in our lives.
May the words of our voices,
the movements of our hands,
the leanings of our hearts,
reflect your gentle, present, persistent love.
Amen.

Blessing

Hear these words of Jesus for you: "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."
(Matthew 11:29)

***With Children**

The creative activities for Monday and Tuesday could be done as group activities with children. Older children could make the crosses described in Friday's session. It might be easier to use sticks or Popsicle sticks and yarn rather than toothpicks and string.

Prayer

Dear God,
Thank you for being gentle with us,
for your love, your care, and your compassion.
Help us to be gentle with each other.
Let our words be gentle.
Let our hands be gentle.
Let our hearts be gentle.
Amen.

Week 9: Self-Control

Thought for the Week: "Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools."~Ecclesiastes 7:9

Opening Prayer

Holy Spirit,
Bear the fruit of self-control in my life.
May I speak and act with intention.
May I choose the good and resist the evil.
Grant your Spirit to sustain me and give me joy on the journey.
Amen

Blessing

You are called to be free, so walk by the Spirit. Live into and out of the Spirit's abundant fruit! Live in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. As you live by the Spirit, may you keep in step with the Spirit as you walk in the way of Jesus. Amen. (From Galatians 5:13-25)

Monday

Scripture: Luke 4:1-13

Reflection: We need self-control to overcome temptation. In this passage, Jesus quotes scripture each time he turns down one of Satan's temptations.

- Prayerfully consider which fruit of the Spirit you are most often tempted to deny: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness or self-control.
- Go back in this book and read the "Thought for the Week" scripture associated with that fruit.
- Get a small blank card with sleeve from the supply envelope in the back pocket.
- Write the chosen scripture on the card and decorate as you wish. Repeat the scripture to yourself as you decorate the card.
- Put the card someplace where you will see it frequently, and try to memorize the scripture this week.

Tuesday

Scripture: I Corinthians 9:24-27; Hebrews 12:1-3

Reflection: Self-control is not just about abstaining from bad things, it is also about pursuing good, Godly things.

- Turn to a blank page.
- Draw a "road" (parallel lines about two inches apart) anywhere you like on the page--straight or curvy . . .
- Label one end of the line "start;" at the other end of the line, you can write or draw the "finish line" using the crown imagery from I Corinthians or the idea of "fixing our eyes on Jesus" from Hebrews.
- Using your colored pencils, write down the practices that help you stay in the race. Write these on the road itself, and then anywhere you like if you run out of road space. Think about your disciplines--things you need self-control to do consistently and well. Also think about habits, those things that come naturally to you that are helpful on your spiritual journey.
- Offer prayers of gratitude for God's presence and strength and prayers for endurance and inspiration as you seek to live out the fruit of self control.

Wednesday

Scripture: Genesis 39

Reflection: Joseph's self control in this story is grounded in his recognition that he already has a really good deal in life: "No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" Joseph also realizes that to give in to this particular temptation would be to sin against God.

- Take a scrap of paper from the back pocket. On the paper, write something you need self control to not do--a food or foods you are trying to avoid, words you want to stop saying, a compulsion you want to keep in check . . .
- Wad up the paper and hold it as you pray for God to show you the abundance in your life. What is God giving you that will allow you to say "no" to this sin?
- When you are done praying, turn to a blank page. At the top write: "I can exercise self control regarding _____ because God has given me . . ."
- On the rest of the page, list those things that came to you in prayer, giving thanks as you write them. You can use your colored pencils if you like.

Thursday

Scripture: I Samuel 24:1-13

Reflection: Most of us will not find ourselves in a position where we are tempted to kill our enemies. But anger can definitely make us lose our self-control. When people make us angry, it is tempting to use biting words, to talk about them behind their backs, to take delight in their misfortunes.

- Below, write about a time that anger caused you to lose your self-control.
- Take a blank card out of the back pocket. Use your colors and paper to make an "I'm sorry" card. This card can be for a person you have hurt, or it can be a confession to God.
- Pray for forgiveness and know that God forgives all of our sins through Christ.
- If appropriate, mail the card.

Friday

Scripture: James 3:3-13

Reflection: One of the hardest parts of ourselves to control is the tongue. In certain situations, we need self-control to speak kind words, to use a gentle tone of voice.

- Get a large card with sleeve from the back pocket.
- Make a list of kind words and phrases--things you would like your tongue to say throughout the day.
- Write these words on one side of the card, decorating as you wish.
- If you like, you can also decorate the other side--maybe write part of today's scripture passage and/or draw a smiley face with its tongue sticking out.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you control your tongue. That the words you speak today will be life giving and loving.

Saturday/Group Session

Opening Prayer

All-Powerful God,

We strive to control ourselves:

our actions, our words, even our thoughts.

Yet we know that ultimately you are in control.

We know and we rejoice.

Grant us strength of mind and will.

Grant us grace.

Amen.

Scripture: Galatians 5:13-26

Thoughts

The fruit of the Spirit grows out of our freedom in Christ. The metaphor of plants is helpful here. We can plant the seeds of this fruit. We can try to create an environment that will allow the seeds to grow--providing water, nutrients, sunshine; pulling weeds, protecting from animals and insects that would eat the plants. What we cannot do is make the seeds sprout and grow. That is the mystery. That is the grace.

Also, while there are nine distinct fruits listed, this study has made it evident that the qualities of a Spirit-centered life are interconnected with each other. When we live out of love, we will be gentle. When we are at peace, we have deeper self-control. Faithfulness is strengthened through patience. We do not nurture these qualities in isolation from each other--they are all part of a Christ-enlivened life.

And most importantly, we do not develop or live out these qualities in isolation from other people. These are *relational* qualities, because a life with God is also a life with God's people. So since we, together, "live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." (Galatians 5:25)

Creative Prayer Activity

- Turn to a blank page.
- Tear up pieces of brown and green paper (solid and/or patterned).
- Make a tree collage with the paper bits. You can put fruit on the tree if you like.
- As you make the collage, consider how you can nurture and protect the fruit of the Spirit that is growing in your life.
- When you have finished the tree, write down some of the ways you would like to nurture the fruit of the Spirit in your life. You may write around your tree, or write on the back of your collage.

Sharing

- Invite group members to share their collages and to share about how they plan to nurture the fruit of the Spirit that is growing in their lives.
- After each person shares, the group can pray for that person briefly. Ask God to continue to guide them and to be with them as they take steps to nurture their spiritual lives.
- If you wish, group members can also share anything that was particularly meaningful for them from the retreat sessions of the previous week.

Closing Prayer

Holy One,

Let us walk by the Spirit and enjoy its fruit:

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

We give thanks for the seeds that have been planted within us;

Let us nurture them well;

And let us rejoice in their growth.

Amen

Blessing

You are called to be free, so walk by the Spirit. Live into and out of the Spirit's abundant fruit! Live in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. As you live by the Spirit, may you keep in step with the Spirit as you walk in the way of Jesus. Amen. (From Galatians 5:13-25)

***With Children**

The sessions for Monday, Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday could be easily adapted for use with a group. The creative projects for Tuesday and Saturday could be done as group projects. (Note that the focus on "the race" for Tuesday's session is highly metaphorical and, therefore, may not work well with children younger than 3rd or 4th grade.)

Prayer

Dear God,

Help us make good decisions

about what we say and about what we do.

Let us do the things we know are right--