

**FRUIT**

OF THE

**HOLY  
SPIRIT**

# Fruit of the Holy Spirit

Bishop Youssef

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

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## **His Holiness Pope Shenouda III**

117<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch  
of the See of St. Mark

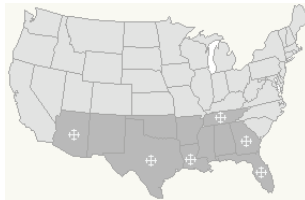


# *About The Diocese*

**H**is Holiness Pope Shenouda III is the 116 Successor of St. Mark the Evangelist. His Holiness' era is marked by a remarkable growth in the number of Coptic churches abroad. To address the needs of these churches, His Holiness felt the urgency to establish dioceses abroad. Thus the first Coptic Orthodox Diocese to be established in the United States is the Diocese of the Southern United States in 1993. H.H. Pope Shenouda III appointed His Grace Bishop Youssef to oversee this Diocese.

The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States is composed of the following states:

- \* Alabama
- \* Arkansas
- \* Georgia
- \* Mississippi
- \* Oklahoma
- \* Texas
- \* Arizona
- \* Florida
- \* Louisiana
- \* New Mexico
- \* Tennessee



There are currently 33 priests serving the 27 churches, and 26 Coptic communities located in the Diocese.

**[www.suscopts.org](http://www.suscopts.org)**







# Introduction

## **Committed Service Instills Fulfilling Happiness**

**T**he tie that binds both happiness and spiritual service is a fundamentally simple one, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). The Lord Jesus Christ not only taught giving; but His very life demonstrated emphatically that serving others is an essential component of spiritual happiness. A person may have unprecedented gifts and talents; but if they choose not to share them with others, those gifts and talents will not bring about the expected fulfillment.

*“There are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities but it is the same God Who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all”* (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

**The first step** towards an enriched, fulfilling service to God is to recognize that gifts and talents are ultimately God’s and His alone. They should not be considered yours neither by you nor by others.

No two servants possess exactly the same identical gifts. It was only the perfect Lord Jesus Christ Who had possessed

all the gifts and talents during His life on earth. God's plan is to assimilate all the infinite number of gifts and talents He has distributed to us all, and make them function together as one.

It is a biblically documented mandate that everyone combine their talents and gifts laboring together in love towards one unified goal without any underlying human dissension. We should embrace this as an expected behavior from us springing from an internal conviction rather than a waited-for effort, if we truly believe our gifts and talents are from God to be utilized for the advancement of His kingdom.

**The second step** towards a happy blessed service is resolved in making a commitment to share our gifts and talents with others. Having the desire to serve is certainly essential; but without determination desire is like a candle without a flame. Wishful thinking alone does not make service burn brightly with productivity and success. Rather, commitment extends desire into unconditional, faithful, seven day a week service. Hard working, progressively moving, validated service turns into a labor of love with committed dedicated servants.

*Origen* (c.248) spoke of the commitment of the church teachers at its inception:

“At the present day, indeed there is a multitude of Christian believers. Not only rich men receive the teachers of Christianity, but also persons of rank, as well as refined and high-born ladies. Some

will perhaps dare to say that it is for the sake of a little glory that certain individuals assume the office of Christian instructors. However it is impossible to reasonably entertain such a notion about Christianity in its beginnings. For back then, the danger incurred was great especially by its teachers.”

Servants cannot serve two masters. They have to choose either the earthly or the heavenly; but they cannot be attached to both and claim they can serve. *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon”* (Matthew 6:24).

Trying to maintain an attachment to both leads to procrastination in completing service works to the best of one’s ability, some readily volunteering their talents and gifts, in addition to sporadic time spent in prayer and preparation for vital services such as deacons’ hymns and Sunday School lessons.

**The third step** following full commitment to His service is having the right attitude in reflecting our gifts and talents. We “choose and wear” our attitude exactly as we do our clothes each and every day. The essential question concerning attitude is, “Does my attitude, supported by my actions, spiritually encourage others to desire to share their gifts and talents, furthering and ensuring the growth of the Church?”

The Lord Jesus Christ prolifically gave a heartfelt example of how the right attitude, the true inner faith we reflect to others should be, *“I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me”* (Matthew 25:35,36). Here, the Lord not only gave an example but also identified Himself with the poor, the homeless, the suffering, and the needy.

With a spiritual attitude one comes to realize that spiritual rather than physical nourishment leads a person to never hunger or thirst again. Offering the garment of righteousness through teaching, exhorting, encouraging, seeking out the sick, visiting the debilitated, immobile elderly, is doing that unto the Lord Himself. There is physical as well as spiritual imprisonment, and among us there are people walking seemingly free, but who are spiritually imprisoned to sin and compliance to a worldly sinful life. Such are the ones our Lord asked us to visit and liberate.

Our commitment and non-condescending attitude towards living a righteous life will eventually lead others to follow our example in desiring the Lord Jesus Christ as Master of their life away from sin and its bitterness. Further, it will demonstrate to those who are ever mindful and watching our example as servants how we are called upon to use our talents and gifts. We must be ever watchful and introspective as servants *“..for who is greater, he who sits at the table or he*

*who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves”* (Luke 22:27).

The spiritual attitude of a servant should also not be overtaken by often seeking the easy, most familiar, less difficult path. St. Paul said, “...*serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me...*” (Acts 20:19).

A servant should also be faithfully seeking positive ways by which to expand and share gifts and talents, persevering for the betterment of the service. The number of years in service, a servant’s age or relations should not place them in higher esteem than other servants.

St. James and St. John, the sons of Zebedee unthinkingly, unsettled the other ten listening disciples by saying, “*Teacher we want You to do for us whatever we ask. And He said to them, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ They said to Him, ‘Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your Glory’*” (Mark 10:35-37).

The Lord called them privately aside and quietly taught them the self-denial in discipleship, “*You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant and whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve*” (Mark 10:42-45).

**The fourth step** is finding spiritual satisfaction in service. Servants should have service as the utmost important source of their happiness. Giving unto others what God has given unto you, becomes to your soul its breath, purpose, and joy. Salty lakes are self contained, with water pouring only internally. Fresh lakes, on the other hand, receive and give fresh water, causing their waters to be really fresh and refreshing. So is the case with service. If it is not contained, but reaching out to others then it becomes refreshing; bringing forth happiness to the giver as well as the receiver.

It is humbling to constantly keep before our eyes the fact that perfection is a quality possessed by only One earthly person, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ earthly life and His death reflect the Perfect Servant in the Perfect Man.

The perfect Man did not ask to be paid for His services. There was no royal fanfare for His miracles, nor was His service motivated by fear. No pretensions or vices overshadowed His service, a donkey was his choice to ride as a king. There were even very few who had said “thank-you”. He served until he went on the cross.

The Lord Jesus Christ reached out to others with His heart not only with His all knowing, all powerful encompassing knowledge. He motivated others not only by **who** He was; but also by **how** He was; humble, ready, patient and loving. His service was truly a labor of love, bringing spiritual happiness to all those who chose to faithfully follow His teachings and His

Holy Example. His epitome of service would fill voluminous Holy Gospels known by those whose watchful observant eyes could not help but commit His examples to memory.

Let us all be thankful to God for bestowing upon us precious gifts, talents, and the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and may He make us worthy to commit them to His Service. May we increase in service and righteous endeavors, fulfilling spiritual happiness and become more upright in good deeds.







# 1 Love

## **Putting Your Heart Into It**

**E**ntreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me (Ruth 1:16-17).

Can I really love someone who isn't my own flesh and blood? Many have to answer this question whether contemplating a close or spiritual friendship, marriage, prospective in-laws or perhaps even the adoption of someone into a family unit coming to your location for college studies or someone who has suffered the loss of their parents.

A question of central concern for the purpose of this writing is a question a servant of the church at any level of service must answer, "How can I actively love those I am serving?"

This question should be contemplated, prayed about and meditated upon. Service should never begin as a function, a territory to cover, designated pages to be completed in a book. Service is not from one certain time until another. Independent, preoccupied, proud, busy, not enough time,

complacent should not be descriptors of the love one has for service.

Serving the church should always be more than showing up when others do not, more than the service before, and more than the number of years spent in service to the Church. Rather, service should be a “spring of life” to those you serve, reflecting your love for God.

*“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him”* (1 John 4:16).

Service should begin with giving your love first to God freely, happily, and joyfully. Love to God should be imitated as He gives His limitless and boundless love to us,

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16).

As one’s love for God abundantly increases, one is then led to the path of loving and serving others. *“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ The Lord Jesus Christ said to him, ‘Feed My lambs’”* (John 21:15).

Service should always ask of itself, “Is my service what it should be?” Effective service begins as a common thread between those that you serve and yourself. The growing

strength of this thread will be comprised of memories of the past, life experiences, and the anticipation of the future. Its gained strength is increased by conquering obstacles, facing fears and challenges together. Striving is the key to success not perfection. Perfection belongs to God alone.

But the striving is definitely essential. It combines service with caring. Striving is visiting the sick at home and in the hospital. It is sitting with someone who has lost a loved one. It is reading the Holy Bible to the elderly whom have poor vision. Striving is providing transportation to church services to those without transportation. It is calling to inquire if they need anything while away at college. It is the giving of the message, "I care." It is living the lessons the servant themselves taught and were taught.

Stop and ask yourself is your service to God full of this love or is it as barren and dry as the desert? Do I feel that I display caring to those whom I serve as I wished my servant to care about me?

Do I actually need to care about my servant or need those whom I serve to care about me especially outside the church building or environment? Many believe their time is their time but it has been quoted an infinite number of times, *"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up... Though One may be overpowered by another, two can*

*withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken”* (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). Have you examined this Holy Scripture from another’s side of the Scripture rather than the meaning it may have for you alone?

Can it be said of the servant providing a service, *“I look up to my servant, my servant is a guiding star, taught me the hymn on my lips, is a candle burning brightly, provides a listening ear or is concerned about my spiritual welfare?”* Can it be said uprightly that those a servant serves, have a spiritual nature very much like the servant’s, deacons very much like their priest, priests very much like their bishops?

*“A new commandment I give to you that you, love one another. As I have loved you, that you also love one another”* (John 13:34).

In summary, many make up the household of faith but there is only one home that has stood for two thousand years. Although you may grow up, the love of the church and its service will always claim you as its own. Just as the sun is the servant of the earth, its heat allows the earth to be productive and grow many good things. A servant should see the same in their service. In turn like the trees and flowers, abundant fruits and seeds are formed. This spirit of service in turn leads us to the Eternal Spirit that is truly fruitful bearing the fullness of beauty and love.

Let us all pray that where we are, there is love of service to God. Love exhibited by a fruitful sweetness that can only be

tasted through affection, kindness, sensitivity, support, and can best be harvested when no one else is looking—a service of giving of ourselves.

Let us all give thanks that time, life, history, and the world cannot break the teachings and care of love and its right hand of associated service to God. May we all put our hearts into His Love and His Loving service.

*St. John Chrysostom said:*

“Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts”. He does not say “given,” but “shed abroad in our hearts,” so showing the profusion of it. That gift then, which is the greatest possible, He has given; not heaven and earth and sea, but what is more precious than any of these, and has rendered us Angels from being men, yea sons of God, and brethren of Christ. But what is this gift? The Holy Spirit. Now had He not been willing to present us after our labors with great crowns, He would never have given us such mighty gifts before our labors. But now the warmth of His Love is hence made apparent, that it is not gradually and little by little that He honors us; but He hath shed abroad the full fountain of His blessings, and this too before our struggles.”

## **Christian Considerations**

- ▣ A love and hate relationship exists with my brother...

*“He who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him”* (1John 2: 10).

- ▣ I find myself hating to be around my parents...

*“But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes”* (1John 2: 11).

- ▣ The Church is really not a part of my life anymore...

*“But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them. I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess”* (Deuteronomy 30: 17-18).

- ▣ I understand the Lord will forsake me if...

*“And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; But if you forsake Him, He will forsake you”* (2 Chronicles 15:2).

- ▣ How does God revive my heart and spirit?

*“For thus says the High and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in he high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit*

*of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones' ”*  
(Isaiah 57: 15).

▣ How do we know we have passed from death?

*“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren, He who does not love his brother abides in death”* (1John 3: 14).

▣ Who is the love of God perfected in?

*“But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him”*  
(1John 2: 5).







# 2 Joy

## **A Domain Of The Feeling Function**

**J**oy is an integral part of a harmonious life lived out for the glory of God and our personal fulfillment and satisfaction. Nowadays, one of the most common problems is the lack of joy, especially among young people who are constantly bombarded with pressure from the surrounding; and the stresses that their concerns about life incur. If those serving in the Kingdom of God have their feeling function of joy undeveloped, it will be difficult for them to relay that joy to those whom they serve.

To say we experience joy is to be able to live joyfully even during the most difficult situations; not only so, but to be able to communicate it biblically, psychologically, traditionally, and ritually to those whom we serve.

### **Who Are We?**

As extroverts, introverts or both, depending on circumstances, maturity level, and exposure, we have been created in the image of God *“Then God said, Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness..”* (Genesis 1:26).

There is a difference between God’s image and His likeness. The former is what we have been created in; the latter is what we have the potential to develop into. The term

*“likeness”* denotes the fulfillment and realization, which we aspire for through spiritual and psychological growth, and maturity. Actualizing and fulfilling this image is what St. Paul described as *“till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:13), thus we reach the likeness of God, which is our ultimate goal.

### **Personality Components**

Sensing, intuiting, thinking, and feeling in various degrees are the four functions that constitute a human personality. God has the four functions fully developed in Him. When we develop those four functions in us, we become Christ-like, in the likeness of God. Each of the four gospels is said to demonstrate a function of the personality of Jesus Christ:

- The Gospel of St. Matthew reflects the Thinking Function
- The Gospel of St. Mark demonstrates the Sensing Function
- The Gospel of St. Luke reflects the Feeling Function
- The Gospel of St. John reflects the Intuition Function

### **What is Joy?**

Inward joy, one of the characteristics of the Christian, is a domain of a well-developed feeling function. It is the second of the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit. Being joyful is not dependent on circumstances; because no matter what happens, a true Christian should be relaxed and radiant capable of illuminating and not depressing his surrounding.

This is because a true Christian who keeps heaven in view will remain serene and cheerful on the darkest day drawing support from the deep river of joy that the Holy Spirit has set course for within us.

## **Characteristics of a Well Developed Feeling Function**

- **Loyalty and Fidelity:**

The quality of being faithful is an aspect of God's perfect feeling function, and a constant attribute of His. Just as God is love, so is He faithful. Our unfaithfulness does not cancel nor alter God's *"For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not"* (Romans 3:3,4).

In order for us to develop into the likeness of Christ, we have to practice faithfulness and loyalty without which the Feeling Function in us is ultimately destroyed. *"Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness"* (Psalm 37:3). A sign of a developed feeling function is that our faithfulness to God and to others will remain constant even when they are not.

- **Doing God's will:**

The joy of Christ consisted in doing His Father's will and work. He told us *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work"* (John 4:34). This was so important in His life, even more satisfying than necessary food. Joy came out of serving and pleasing the heavenly Father. It was a common recurring theme of His life and ministry.

## **Means of Nourishing and Developing the Feeling Function**

- **Remembering:**

Remembering and sharing good news with others is a sure source of happiness. David the Psalmist expressed this truth in *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity”* (Psalm 133:1). The act of remembering happy occasions, moments, and incidents brings about joy in the heart and nurtures the feeling function.

That is the aim behind celebrating feasts, anniversaries, and recalling happy events. Positive memories energize feelings, heal wounds, and deepen commitments to the covenants that bind us.

In the same way, commemorating major events like the Nativity, Resurrection and celebrating feasts of the saints, renew our commitments to God and open us up for hope, healing, and life renewal. This joy generating concept of celebrating and sharing the good news is found in many of Christ's parables such as the lost son, the lost coin, and the lost sheep to mention a few. These parables give us an insight into the heart of God that is willing to celebrate and experience His pure joy especially that of reaching the lost.

- **Repeating:**

In the Holy Book of Deuteronomy 4:9-10, God commands Moses, his children, and his children's children to remember how He, the Almighty had rescued the Israelites from the land

of Egypt delivering them with a mighty hand. This positively confirms the importance of Tradition in our spiritual and social practices.

Tradition, is telling the old story over and over again. In doing so, we nourish our present and protect our future. The outcome of these commemorating experiences is a form of energy called gratitude. The term is derived from the root word “grace.” So, gratitude is an energy-charged joyful reaction to the graces obtained. This is also manifest in the Arabic language where the word for “feast” means “عيد” repeatedly remember the joyful events. Whoever forgets the graces of God will never be grateful and consequently will never experience Joy.

There is an inevitable link between the three elements: prayer, joy, and thanksgiving. They are commands issued from God directly for us to obey and implement. *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”* (1Thessalonians 5:16 - 18). The links in the chain are interrelated and interdependent; so much so that a breakdown in one will lead to a breakdown in the cycle; since each one feeds the other.

David has fulfilled this command expressively in praying, rejoicing, and giving thanks while remembering the good deeds that God has done to him; *“Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your*

*iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things” with the outcome being “So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Psalm 103:1-5).*

In the same psalm, David is prophetically being reminded by the Holy Spirit of the real source of all these benefits that he is surrounded with. It is the Redemptive act of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. Without this redemption, we would still be in Satan’s bondage reaping the fruit of pain, death, and destruction. *“For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:11-14).*

## **Causes of Lack of Joy**

- Sin:

The seat of feeling is the heart. Many evidences from the Holy Bible proves sin to be the main cause of hardness of heart (Psalm 106, Isaiah 1:4). Thus, a hardened heart, because of sin, cannot experience the gift of joy. Counter to the productive positive cycle that exists in a joyful heart; a negative one emerges in a hardened heart. This is because sin leads to hardness of heart; and hardness of heart leads to lack of joy.

Unless the source is eliminated; this cycle will not be replaced with the one which has praise, gratitude, and joy as its components. Hardness of heart is considered a spiritual amnesia, a spiritual psychological condition in which we experience forgetfulness of God's graces and goodness and dwell in our negative thoughts and self-centeredness. God warns against this perilous state of mind and heart in (Deuteronomy 8:11) *“Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today”* .

- **Decay and Paralysis of Commemoration:**

When people stop commemorating significant spiritual incidents, they cut themselves off of the value of Tradition turning it into a burden and an obsolete historical bunch of practices.

- **Loss of Focus:**

When we focus on the wrong things, the wrong input, and the wrong attitudes; we have lost sight of what is important in maintaining joy and living the joyful life; thus missing what joy is all about.

## **Consequences of the Absence of Joy**

- **Loss of Power:**

*“For the joy of the Lord is your strength”* (Nehemiah 8:10) so, according to this biblical truth, lack of joy equals lack of strength. A sad heart cannot have a strong positive outlook to

life nor to all that is in it. Besides, a wounded and hardened heart distorts God's feeling image.

This condition will reflect on the person's spiritual life and how he perceives church rituals and practices. For example, an unhappy heart will not enjoy the treasures existing in the Divine Liturgy. The Divine Liturgy is essentially a remembrance of the redemptive act of Christ. "*Do this in remembrance of me*" (Luke 22:19). A sad, hardened heart will not be able to perceive the rich joy that exists in attending the Divine Liturgy.

Having missed the mark, he will experience frustration and impatience; and his worship will consequently turn into a traditional, lifeless one. God described this psychological, emotional state, also experienced by the Israelites, saying "*These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me*" (Matthew 15:8).

Contrary to such an apathetic state of mind and attitude is the priest's joyful one. In concluding the Liturgy rituals the serving priest concludes by saying "our mouth is filled with joy and our tongue with gladness."

- **Loss of Faithfulness:**

A sad heart becomes unfaithful to God and alien to the sources of his life and talents. St. Paul in his first epistles to the Corinthians, speaks extensively of this state of denial of the source of all things and the subsequent pretentious thinking



otherwise. *“And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”* (1 Corinthians 4:7).

As a result of this mental and emotional apathy, happiness gets replaced with sadness, depression, loss of spiritual vision, and lack of incentive to exploit and gain with the talents we have been entrusted with.

## **Recovery of Joy**

- **Holy Contrition:**

Sadness and grief can be made use of in a beneficial way. They can be altered in nature and turned into a holy one leading to repentance and change. Such grief will then gain a new name and be described as holy; leading to full joy *“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted”* (2 Corinthians 7:10).

A very prominent character who experienced this double fold process is the prodigal son who, all of a sudden, awoke from his spiritual amnesia; and because of God’s mercy, grace, love, and acceptance, gained spiritual awareness, and real contrition that led to repentance. This spontaneity of grief and joy, sorrow and compassion, comes from one place and one place only and that is the redemptive act of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

Those who have not freely entered the experience of God’s free merciful act on the Cross cannot be disposed to accept

compassion from others nor show it to them. We need God's redemptive mercy to be activated and actualized in our lives before we can manifest and bestow it on the others.

Here comes the role of the Holy Spirit as an intercessor, teacher, and comforter. The Holy Spirit-inspired Litany for the Sick, requesting psychological and physical healing; prays for seven needs: mercy, rest, refreshment, grace, help, salvation, and forgiveness.

When we call upon God, the help for the helpless, hope for the hopeless, and comfort for the faint-hearted; we will find the answer in the exclusive tenderness of Jesus Christ Who can heal from all kinds of injuries including physical, psychological, and emotional injuries.

- **Shift in Focus:**

When we start to focus on the right thing, which is mainly our relationship with God, Then we will be able to relax and rejoice; confessing with St. Paul, "*who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*" (Romans 8:35). This is a learning process which even St. Paul had to go through before he could say "*I have learned*" (Philippians 4:11) the secret of being joyful and content in any and every situation.

David the psalmist had his focus and priorities rightfully established; that led him to experience the everlasting joy. "*I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved*" (Psalm 16:8).

The joy of the Lord is the answer to living a meaningful life; and the one very important element in completing the character of a Christian. Joy gives us a taste of what heaven must be like. So much so, that even when life strips us of all the circumstances that would normally bring a sense of happiness, we will be able to boldly profess with the Old Testament prophet that *“though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation”* (Habakkuk 3:17,18).

*St. Gregory Thaumaturgus said:*

“Today are strains of praise sung joyfully by the choir of angels, and the light of the advent of Christ shines brightly upon the faithful. Today is the glad spring time to us, and Christ the Sun of righteousness has beamed with clear light around us, and has illumined the minds of the faithful. Today is Adam made anew, and moves in the choir of angels, having winged his way to heaven. Today is the whole circle of the earth filled with joy, since the sojourn of the Holy Spirit has been realized to men. Today the grace of God and the hope of the unseen shine through all wonders transcending imagination, and make the mystery that was kept hid from eternity plainly discernible to us. (...) Today is fulfilled the word of David, “Let the

heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad. the fields shall be joyful, and all the trees of the wood before the Lord, because He comes” (Ps 95:11-13 LXX).”



### **The Fruit Of Peace Casts Out Fear**

Peace has a special Biblical connotation. It is often called the first fruit of faith. *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1). The Lord Jesus Christ is considered the *“Prince of Peace”*. Being the truest source of peace known to man today, the Son of God, found no price great enough for peace and shed His own blood for its sake, *“Having made peace through the blood of His cross”* (Colossians 1:20).

Peace is considered one of God’s greatest gifts to us in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ and to keep Him ever present in thought, the word peace was to become the Jewish word of custom to address both a greeting and a good-bye, so important was the word for God’s presence in everyday life.

Today, we continue to recite in the Divine Liturgy, “Peace be with all”, before the Prayer of Reconciliation and following the Orthodox Creed.

The Lord Jesus Christ often spoke of perfect peace reconciling humanity with God and not being afraid. *“Peace I leave you with; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you let not your heart be troubled, neither*

*let it be afraid*” (John 14:27). This the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to His disciples concerning His eventual sequence of death including His Resurrection, Ascension into Heaven, and the Pentecost sending of the Holy Spirit. It further implies that peace is more than an earthly gift left behind, but a spiritual gift and an inheritance to the faithful.

This “Peace be to you” message was to fill the disciples’ hearts with such great peace, with such great joy, and such great comfort to go out and spread such Great News that it would continue to impact our lives some two thousand years later.

Peace was not only the message at the end of the Lord Jesus Christ’s earthly life but it was the message present from its very inception. The Archangel Gabriel said to St. Mary upon her destiny to be the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, “*Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.*” To further ensure peace an Angel of the Lord said unto St. Joseph, “*Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 1:20). Both, St. Mary and St. Joseph (through his willing faith inspired adoption) were to receive the gift of Peace.

The angels announcing to the lowly shepherds “*Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people...*” (Luke 2:10). This was indeed the night of Peace, the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. This verse was to

be followed with “*Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth, peace*” (Luke 2:14). When did peace come to earth except when the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God was born and brought His goodness and goodwill to all men?

The Lord Jesus Christ spoke these words to the disciples following His Glorious Resurrection, “*Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?*” (Luke 24: 38) again reinforcing with peace there is no need to be afraid, no need for doubting or for troubled hearts. Peace enlightens our joy and happiness. There is no abounding negativity with peace. Only peacefulness brings us nearer to the Lord our God.

What is this peace of God, and why is it connected most often to deter fear? Fear is present in most facets of life. We see homes with electronic alarm systems, learn of children with their family’s guns at schools, hear constant talk of the Iraq War, Israeli bombings, and disruption of life in Southern Egypt.

People ask, “But should we not be cautious and watchful?” Certainly, but alarm systems do not deter fear. Fear is not cast out by suicide bombings in the Middle East. Rather wars and rumors of war, gives seed to more fear and growing fear becomes the needless cause of tyranny and troubles of the day.

It must be said here, that many Biblical scholars today believe, “But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also,”

means not to resist violence with further violence escalating the violence.

In essence it means that an evil person or one that directs evil to another person can only be overcome by goodness. Why? Because it keeps us as individuals incurring the slap, peaceful helping us to maintain our goodness, and keeping us free from anger and its destructiveness. It teaches us the preference of other fruits of peace such as forbearance being favored over violent acts. The teachings set forth do not contradict the state's need and right to protect its citizens and to punish criminals. Rather, it addresses our actions and responsibilities as individuals.

It reinforces and turns our focus to, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God”* (Matthew 5:9). Peace brings us as Christian individuals into communion with God being called His sons. Peace brings us into harmony with God's created world. Peace is in essence imitating the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore only peacemakers can share in God's peace, share it with others, and participate in the work of God's only begotten Son. His Son and we as peacemakers being His sons become as one with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Only the peace of God keeps fear in check. Only the peace of God assures us all that we are not alone regardless of what is happening in the world, in our communities, and in our work places. Peace gives us the presence of God working in



our lives, making us confident that whatever comes our way it can be taken care of.

*Tertullian* (c. 207) wrote this about peace and the perfect world as the Lord Jesus Christ was the perfect Person of peace,

“And they will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.’ In other words, they will change the dispositions of injurious minds, hostile tongues, blasphemy, and all kinds of evil into pursuits of moderation and peace. ‘Nations will not lift up swords against nations.’ That is, they will not stir up conflict. ‘Neither will they learn war any more’ that is, provocation of hostilities. So you should learn from this that Christ was not promised to be powerful in war. Rather, He was promised to pursue peace. Now, you must deny either that these things were foretold (although they are plainly seen) or that they have been fulfilled (although you read of them).”

## **Christian Considerations**

▣ Is there less confrontation following the Lord?

*“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit”* (Romans 8: 1).

▣ If someone is angry at me what must I do?

*“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger”* (Proverbs 15: 1).

▣ Is their peacefulness fulfilling the lust of the flesh?

*“I say then: walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”* (Galatians 5: 16).

▣ Is it possible to peacefully please God?

*“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* (Hebrews 11: 6).

▣ Why must we « learn of the Lord Jesus Christ »?

*“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”* (Matthew 11: 29).

▣ Who are called the « children of God »?

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”* (Matthew 5: 9).



# 4 Patience

## **A Fruit That Positively Affects Your Perspective And Attitude**

Everyone would like to add the virtue of patience to his/her personal attributes. Patience not only adds to our degree of spiritual fruitfulness but helps us to accomplish the most difficult of tasks with the least amount of effort. If you desire your life to be fruitful and productive, your heart will be conducive to hearing and obeying God's Word often with a patient ear. If you are complacent about hearing and obeying the Word of God, attaining fruits of the spirit will be a constant problem in your life. You will not achieve a fulfilling life but be in constant search of it.

*“But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty”*

(Matthew 13:23).

Many look toward support groups, toward self-help books and media outreach programs, and toward attachments to others and or groups for achieving a worldly optimal life style often overlooking the spiritual seeds of God's Word and applying Biblical truths to your life. While support groups are transient parts of a mobile society, self-help advise changes

almost daily, and attachment to others can sometimes be sources of frustration, God is stable, a source of security, ever present and unchanging encouraging us to bear fruits which will ultimately enrich our life.

Take caution when those around you tend to be impatient, have an on-going spirit of discontentment, a complaint of every sort, a negative attitude, and a detailed list of everything wrong happening in their life that they regularly converse about. Avoid these sorts of groups, meetings, and friends because it will encourage you to self-indulge in the negative behavior as well. In an age of “support systems” one must put God first in their time of need and as their ultimate source of support.

When things in life become difficult and hard to comprehend we tend to desire a packaged solution that is readily available and mass produced. When things remain difficult and beyond our understanding for longer than we believe necessary, we tend to want to do something, anything, to take care of the problem. We may even wonder why God does not intervene and do something to rid us of our problem.

Patience is one of life’s most desirable and sought after fruits of the spirit. We often ask God for more patience in dealing with our problems. Sometimes in our pursuit of patience we think God may be testing us and this could absolutely be true. Testing a person is actually taking an assessment to see the need for improvement in a person. Don’t

we all need improvement in our earthly lives? On the other hand, the reverse may be true and we often find ourselves testing God, such as asking ourselves, is He really there? Does He really care about me? Is He concerned about my life?

*“Jesus said to him, ‘It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’”* (Matthew 4:7).

God needs no testing. God is perfect; He is the measure of perfection, therefore, God needs no improvement. So logically it does not make sense to even desire to test God by questioning His actions in our lives. We must believe that He knows what is best for each of us and therefore learn the usefulness of the fruit of patience.

When we think about what is upsetting our life circumstances with no apparent solution in sight, think about things in perspective, such as why did the woman healed on the Sabbath in the Holy Gospel of St. Luke 13:11-12, have to suffer eighteen years with a spirit that had crippled her before she was healed by the Lord Jesus Christ?

*“And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, ‘Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity’”* (Luke 13:11-12).

With increasing patience a person learns to think in a positive manner, rather than a confused or angry manner. Impatience generally does not lead to a solution, but simply

causes a person to lose their inner peace. The person who has patience, and thinks positively about what happens to him will think calmly and make his situation pass peacefully. The woman with the spirit for eighteen years when healed glorified God.

But the person who cannot think positively but chooses to dwell on the negative aspects of things loses his patience and his thoughts become agitated and anxiety will make one thought integrate into another thought. The anxiety will increasingly build within the person and soon an outburst will occur. Not only outbursts of frustration emerge, but an anxious disposition develops that can be exhausting, spiritually troubling, and instills fear.

Nervous exhaustion can lead the one to intolerance, preoccupation with their troubles in life, and increased anxiety levels. Again with the fruit of patient endurance in all things, a release from the stresses and strains encompassing our daily lives is learned. Have you ever heard an eight year old say, "Boy am I stressed out!"

How can a child of eight be stressed out? Perhaps he has heard one of his parents or his Sunday School servant say this. Being stressed out is a rather sad characteristic to imitate at such a young age. Rather he should have heard his parents or servant say faith and patient endurance can find a way.

*"Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near*

*Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven you.'*"

(Mark 2:3-5).

With patient endurance, four people brought a paralyzed man to the Lord Jesus Christ to be healed. He had to be carried. The crowd to see the Lord Jesus had become so large it was overflowing out of the building. Most would have given up and said 'I can't'. Patiently and calmly the four firmly believed the Lord Jesus Christ could heal their friend and they continued to think in a positive manner. Thinking positively they went up the outside stairs and opened a hole in the roof. Through the hole they lowered a paralyzed man directly into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The point is that when the four men encountered an obstacle, a great obstacle, and blocked the paralyzed man's only chance to be healed, they did not see a challenge that could not be conquered but rather explored other approaches into the building where the Lord Jesus could be encountered. The over-crowded building and multitudes of on-lookers were not seen as a dead-end street but rather as the four men needed another way to approach their final destination.

Patience adheres to the one step at a time method. Take a step then another step. With each step have faith. Moving mountains were often a Biblical phrase that encouraged people

that with the smallest of faith you can move mountains. Patient enduring faith to overcome the insurmountable mountain or the hardest tasks in life can be accomplished with a desire to grow in faith, patience, and trust that something can happen as all things are possible with God.

The Israelites did not have patience when upon leaving their four-hundred year bondage of servitude in Egypt, they followed Moses into the desert. They complained about lack of enough water, about the food, and about their lack of meat. God provided them with water, with manna from Heaven and with quail. Yet with all these provisions they continued to lack patience. Why? They did not starve, did not succumb to thirst, and the Holy Bible even tells us that after forty years of wandering the very shoes on their feet did not wear out.

There was a dire consequence to their moaning and groaning and lack of contentment and patience:

*“Now when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp. Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the Lord, the fire was quenched”*  
(Numbers 11:1-2).

Perhaps we can all learn from the Israelites a valuable lesson in that patience is *“...learned in whatever state I am in to be content. I know how to be abased and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both*



*to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4:11-13).

As St. Paul teaches us and the church in Philippi, he gives us the key to patience. We must believe in the authority of God and that through His strength we can overcome whatever life may bring.

May we all strive to be increasingly patient, content in all things, and fruitful being anxious for nothing in handling the daily pressures of life.

## **Christian Considerations**

### **▣ Is God patient with me?**

*“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”*

(2 Peter 3: 9).

### **▣ Will I walk and not faint, run and not be weary?**

*“But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary they shall walk and not faint”* (Isaiah 40: 31).

### **▣ If my mind studies and stays upon the Lord...**

*“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you”* (Isaiah 26: 3).

▣ What is patience's perfect work ?

*“But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing”* (James 1: 4).

▣ Who are « blessed are they » ?

*“Therefore the Lord will wait, that he may be gracious to you; And therefore He will be exalted, that he may have mercy on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; Blessed are all those who wait for Him”* (Isaiah 30: 18).



# 5 Kindness

## **The Branch That Holds The Fruit To The Tree**

**T**he Lord Jesus Christ while upon this earth, was the type of individual who could make the common person feel special, the unbeliever believe, and the unrighteous desire for righteousness.

The Lord Jesus Christ showed many kindnesses to others, did many good things for the unfortunate, did not neglect the poor and suffering and did not avoid those whom were outside his cultural understanding when preaching and teaching.

Through His enduring loving kindness the Lord Jesus Christ neither boasted of his self-worth, ridiculed nor belittled an individual because of the burdens carried within their hearts and minds making their nature weak. By His loving kindness he not only relieved them of their challenges in life but restored them so that they could further exemplify that kindness He initially bestowed upon them onto others in need, rekindling the kindness over and over again so great was the effect of THE TREE that bore the fruit of kindness.

The Lord Jesus Christ's kindness must have branched forth from Him as the sun radiates from the heaven. His Kindness and favor were renowned and His reputation preceded and

followed Him wherever He journeyed. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said,

*“I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own”* (John 10:14).

Thus, He knows our need for His kindness and favor, and most importantly He bestows it upon us, He is good to us.

The fruit of kindness is abundant in its effects as it can also bring forth comfort. It signifies a comforting deed performed from the heart.

*St. Clement of Alexandria said,*

*“Fear works abstinence from what is evil, but love exhorts to the doing of good, by building up to the point of spontaneity”* (c. 195).

There are many symbolic inferences in the Holy Bible which alludes to the Lord Jesus Christ’s kindness in bringing comfort to others, such as within the beloved Psalm of David,

*“Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me”* (Psalm 23:4).

A rod and a staff to the multitudes of sheep in a shepherd’s flock meant caring, guidance, and safety. Used correctly, it could be a kind act which saved the lives of his herd which could in ancient days incorporate the young, the middle aged, and the elderly among the sheep. The herd could be comprised of a ram or lamb, a pure bred or mixed, a sickly or healthy

one and one that frequently strayed or those whom always obeyed the commands of the shepherd. But the rod and staff meant the same to them all, an act of kindness, of caring, of comfort.

For us an act of kindness can also be in simple teaching, in redirection, and an act of faith.

*“So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?’ .He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ .He said to him, ‘Feed My lambs’”* (John 21:15).

What is the Lord Jesus Christ saying to Simon Peter? The Lord is instructing him to do works of kindness... Feed the hungry ones, minister to the sick, the handicapped, and terminally ill, remember those others have forgotten (the sick and shut-in perhaps), care for those without homes, love those whom others do not and take the love and kindness of the Lord to all those who will but listen.

St. Peter certainly did not expect to take the Word of God to the gentiles. The thought most probably did not cross his mind or enter into his heart for consideration. But being provoked by a dream and receiving visitors sent by Cornelius (Acts 10), St. Peter understood the need to cross boundaries of culture, his own weak understanding, and with courage he ventured forth to extend the Lord’s loving kindness and teachings to all those people in need of it and who would but listen.

The opposite of kindness is hate. Often, in visiting families I hear “I hate you” frequently and liberally used. Those who say “I hate you” to their parents or brothers and sisters, are developing a deep seated problem in their personality. It is both wrong and unhealthy. Hating one another is not alluded to anywhere in the Holy Bible as acceptable or beneficial. It leaves no doubt that one person hating another is wrong. The Holy Bible rather teaches us that hating sin is proper hatred.

Therefore, when you tell someone, parents or siblings, that you hate them, you are committing a very sinful act. The wrong action here is in the telling the person you hate them not for the wrong or perceived wrong you believe to have happened. A second wrongful action would not have occurred if the person had chosen kindness rather than hate to approach the problem at hand.

The Lord hated the sin but He did not hate the sinner. Kindness can defuse hate; can defuse the sinful nature of man. Kindness is most often the right thing to demonstrate in any given situation, and it is proven both psychologically and physically to be the healthy thing to do.

Hating someone and bitterness can lead to heart disease, ulcers, and somatic pain. It can lead to many physical complaints. It increases our internal stress level, leads to premature aging, and can ultimately lead to premature death which is a severe price to pay for hatred. We are taught an exact act of kindness to perform for those whose acts we oppose and that is prayer.

*“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you”* (Matthew 5:44).

*Polycarp* (c. 135) taught,

““He that has love is far from every sin.” We must put forth the image of God. “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious,...” (Exodus 34:6).”

The Lord Jesus Christ exhibited His loving kindness within every opportunity and situation, and for those of desperation and courage it was often recognizable by the look of compassion upon His holy face.

For the hemorrhaging woman suffering with the most untoward situation imaginable by Jewish law, was condemned unclean and for twelve years labeled as an outcast because of her illness she derived through most probably no fault of her own.

The Lord Jesus Christ immersed in her life on route to bring a young girl back from earthly death. The Lord Jesus Christ, it can be assumed surrounded by His chosen disciples and the ensuing crowd of people thickly gathering around them, was preaching and teaching. She reached out only to touch the hem of His cloak. Her bravery and her courage cannot be put into words. Where did she find it? What made her take this leap of faith often spoke about in sermons? Most probably the

kindness upon the face of the Lord Jesus Christ which gave her the faith to become, not only physically well, but changed her spiritual life and gave clarity to her strength of faith.

The Lord Jesus Christ had made an outcast into a woman of great faith and history would make her an example for others. The despicable woman with a bleeding disorder, an outcast of her own culture, would be a chosen example of the kindness of heart of the Lord Jesus Christ which would live on in history outlasting even her earthly existence. She did not die an outcast of Jewish law but as an example of kindness shown directly upon her by the Lord Himself.

Kindness can be heard in one's voice as well as seen upon one's countenance. It is an old adage that some people are unable to see because of egotism, materialism, prejudice, greed, fear, love of power or revenge, and sometimes because of self-hate. Blindness can indeed also be of a physical nature.

The voice of kindness is more readily listened to willingly and can often be better understood without defense. The voice of kindness can induce someone to inspect and see the damage or defect in their eyes and want to correct it.

*“So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, saying, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ He said, ‘Lord, that I may receive my sight.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Receive*



*your sight; your faith has made you well.' And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God"*

(Luke 18:40 - 43).

The blind man, it can be asserted, could definitely not see the cause of the excitement around him when he was told Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. But could the blind man discern the voice of the Lord when he actually did pass by? We know he added his voice to the crowd. Did the Lord Jesus Christ happen to stop at just the right moment in His lengthy and unceasing travels, and/or did the blind man recognize and relate to a kind voice with great faith?

It was clearly documented the Lord Jesus Christ directly and purposefully asked the blind man what he wanted and he gave him a direct answer, the blind man asked for his physical sight (it is almost obvious that the man possessed the ability to see spiritually in his recognition of his ability to ask the Lord for sight and expect to receive it). The Lord Jesus Christ's kindness, giving sight to a blind man, increased His followers that day by another faithful one, now he is prepared to follow Him. His kindness had made a willing heartfelt follower out of a blind man.

Kindness affects many people in different ways but it typically AFFECTS people. These are but a few effects of kindness. Other acts of kindness included preventing the stoning of a woman, caused a sinful man to give half his goods

to the poor, restore fourfold to those he had taken from with false accusations. Kindness can change the lives of others and we should and can serve as the branch to produce its fruits in the lives of others today.

“Lord You know the alertness of my enemies; and as for my weakness, You are aware of it, My Creator. Therefore, I, hereby, place my soul into Your Hands. So cover me with the wings of Your goodness (kindness), lest I might sleep to death. Enlighten my eyes by the greatness of Your sayings, and raise me up at all times for Your glorification, for You alone are good and lover of mankind” (Blessed Prayer of the Veil).

### **Christian Considerations**

▣ Do you find yourself judging others ?

*“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned forgive, and you will be forgiven”* (Luke 6: 37).

▣ Do you hold a grudge against a friend ?

*“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned forgive, and you will be forgiven”* (Luke 6: 37).

▣ Do you condemn the behavior of another ?

*“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned forgive, and you will be forgiven”* (Luke 6: 37).

▣ How can I truly show kindness towards others ?

*“By whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison”* (1 Peter 3: 19).

▣ Who will « See God » ?

*“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”*  
(Matthew 5: 8).





# 6 Goodness

## **Goodness is a reflection of God:**

**F**or You Lord are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You” (Psalm 86:5).

It is important as we continue on in our addressing of the fruit of the spirit, to remember what is implied by the word “fruit”. It is a seed, an initial beginning that is given to us and up to us to plant it, nurture it, allow it to grow and reproduce. A fruit is first a trial then a triumph if one makes the most out of their life.

This is different than a God given gift in which lies a talent or particular desirable human characteristic that requires only being tapped into for its use.

The fruit of “goodness” is a fruit with many far reaching sprouts...

*“Therefore as we have the opportunity, let us do good unto all”* (Galatians 6:10).

We are instructed to do good to all people. This does not mean “to pay back” a wrong done to you with another wrong. If someone decides they are not going to speak to you, should

you not speak to them either? If someone steals your money, do you steal it back? If someone tells a lie against you, do you tell something bad even if it is the truth against them? Did this manner of behavior ever instill goodness in a person?

What makes a person good? What helps a person “stay on the good side” of goodness? We are told the truly good persevering person is...

*“... Like a tree planted by the rivers of water...”* (Psalm 1:3).

The Holy Bible uses many illustrations to teach us the good in a person must be allowed to grow, must be nurtured, must gain strength, becomes a stronghold and must be protected. Certainly, the best in life may not be that which comes easily. The flowering rose bud is protected by its sharp thorns. The sweetness of honey is defended by the sting of a bee.

Goodness at all times conquers all. Goodness is God-like so we can be assured of its fortitude in our lives. Can you ever remember a time in your life when goodness did not ultimately win out?

The old adage of “if you are rejected for your goodness you will eventually be accepted for it” is certainly true. If you are shunned because of your goodness, because you hold steadfast to your beliefs, your Coptic Church, your faithfulness to put God first in your life, you will ultimately be respected for those beliefs if you act according to them rather than allude to them.

If you are put to trial and take on the fruit of goodness, you will triumph. It is as they say... first the (rugged ways of the) cross then the crown.

*“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”*  
(Romans 12:21).

St. Paul resonated the effects of goodness in his life...

*“I have fought the good fight...”* (2 Timothy 4:7).

What did St. Paul’s reference to goodness and a good fight mean in this Holy Scripture? A good fight meant the harder St. Paul fought for that which he believed in, the stronger his trust and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ became. A good fight increases courage by letting us face the things within us we fear most.

*“... I have finished the race, I have kept the faith”*  
(2 Timothy 4:7).

A good fight helps us conquer what we fear the most within us. St. Matthew (5:44) instructs...

*“... Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you”* (Matthew 5:44).

It has often been said through the ages that good men are not as good as often thought and few men are as bad as their enemies imagine. This is certainly something to contemplate on when evaluating the actions of and labeling others.

Rather the focus should be on us, standing for something good, standing in the goodness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and desiring the eternal goodness of Heaven.

It is my prayer that as St. Paul taught the churches in Galatia that we all strive to live a fruitful life of goodness and that we...

*"... Not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith"* (Galatians 6:9-10).

## **Christian Considerations**

▣ I enjoy popularity before goodness...

*"But many who are first will be last, and the last first"*  
(Matthew 19: 30).

▣ Expensive clothes help me express myself...

*"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"*  
(Matthew 6: 21).

▣ I am ashamed of my parent's income status...

*"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows"*  
(1Timothy 6: 10).



▣ My social friends make fun of Divine Liturgy...

*“Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you”*  
(1John 3: 13).

▣ Did God ever lie to persuade others ?

*“In hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began”* (Titus 1: 2).

▣ Does God know needs in a contemporary world ?

*“Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him”* (Matthew 6: 8).

▣ The Lord Jesus Christ is called « Good Shepherd »...

*“I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father, and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring and they will hear My voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd”* (John 10: 14-16).





# 7 Faith

## **A Commitment To Be Lived**

**F**aith is more than just the five letter word that spells it. Faith is not one simple definition but an on-going process of constant learning, growing, failure, restoration, and empowerment. It takes effort and stamina to build faith. It takes courage to fail and rise up, persistence to attack negative thoughts and defend true precepts. It is a commitment in one's life to live what you believe, a call to preparation to represent your belief, accepting your mistakes as necessary to strengthen your faith, to live wisely, and above all to remain true to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Building a strong and mature faith requires, “starting at the bottom and working your way up”. In today's world, society encourages us to start fast and prepare, if at all, along the way. We are indoctrinated to start as close to the top of the ladder as possible and that it is okay to miss a few steps. With faith, this does not work and is not productive at any phase of establishing a strong faith and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

*First*, we must learn to trust in God. The Lord Jesus Christ was constantly discouraged by the sporadic, maybe even

surprising lack of faith in His disciples and followers. Perhaps the Lord Jesus Christ wanted them to completely trust in His Word with the simple, less complicated experiences in their life, so that they could fathom the glorious Resurrection which would be in their future.

From the transformed disciples calling to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, from their travelling and personal experiences with Him, from His preaching and teachings they were always privileged to, from their own personal teachings gleaned from Him, should the Lord have lamented once regarding their lack of faith?

Does faith come easily?

*“He answered him and said, ‘O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me.’ Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’ And he said, ‘From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.’ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’”*

(Mark 9:19-24).

*Second*, a strong belief in the Lord Jesus Christ and His teachings is the next phase in the development of faith.

Humbleness is an integral part in a developing faith that should be intertwined with believing in the goodness of the Lord Jesus Christ...

*“The centurion answered and said, ‘Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.’ When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!’”* (Matthew 8:8-10).

*Third*, once a strong belief in the Lord Jesus Christ develops within a person, one must be Biblically literate to reinforce his beliefs both personally and for others he will encounter. You cannot play a sport if you do not understand the rules or cannot refer back to them when they are challenged. You cannot defend your faith if you do not understand it.

*“And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren’”* (Luke 22:31-32).

*Fourth*, faith is a call to action and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you ever noticed that those youth who do not fail are usually those youth who are not out there

trying very hard? The point is people who try, learn methods of trying. People who try, may fail at times, but learn from their failures and become stronger.

St. Peter is a good example for us of someone who made mistakes but eventually as his faith matured, he learned from his mistakes, went to prison for his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and was martyred because of his strong faith.

St. Peter walked on water for a distance and then could no longer and sank due to his faltering faith that started out strong but was not mature enough yet for the deed. Many remember his “sinking faith” rather than he is most probably the only man to live upon this earth that has ever walked upon water. Although he was certainly “a quick immature starter” look at how strong was the faith he started off with and how much stronger it would become.

St. Peter was quick to act, quick to speak, and quick to run away from Gethsemane which leads us to speculate that he, as us, are long term works in progress. St. Peter was often humiliated by his failure of faith, often hesitant to challenge his faith for fear of failure, but when St. Peter did fail and recover from his failure, St. Peter was more effective than ever in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Failures of faith should be seen as challenges because we all are going to fail as part of our human nature. We all fall short of the glory of God. No matter how gifted you are, no matter how committed you are, no matter how many friends you have, you are prone to failure. Failure does not elude

anyone particularly when it comes to faith. Failure is certainly humbling but should never be seen as finality.

*Fifth*, faith also calls us to be prepared at all times and at all places to support our beliefs.

*“But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect”* (Matthew 24:43-44).

*“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept”* (Matthew 25:1-5).

*Sixth*, praying for stronger faith and asking the Lord to guide our actions is another important component of faith. Faith is the willingness to believe and trust that God cares about each of us and is with us each day. Faith is not something full of emotion, of grandiosity, is not perfect, and often requires confidence in the fact that what we are doing is the right thing to do.

When we think about David and Goliath, certainly the size and powerfulness of the faithful person was not central to

winning. When the paralyzed man was brought to the Lord Jesus Christ, the huge crowds surrounding the Lord Jesus Christ would have been enough to turn many of those with conviction away. The woman who reached out to touch the hem of the Lord Jesus Christ's cloak shows us a deeper trust that in the Lord all things are possible.

Faith ensures an effort of some sort is made, develops confidence, and leads us to believe that something positive can happen.

Hebrew teachers, in Biblical days, would often use imagery of moving mountains to point out to and encourage the disciples that the most difficult of missions could be carried out with the smallest of faith. What seems overwhelming, insurmountable, and rugged as a mountain top can be overcome by a little faith.

*“So Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.’”*

(Matthew 17:20).

*Origen (c. 245) says,*

“If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain...” The mountains here spoken of are, in my opinion, the hostile



powers that have their being in a flood of great wickedness... Whenever, then, anyone has all faith so that he no longer disbelieves in any things that are contained in the Holy Scriptures... he has all faith as a grain of mustard seed.”

In summary, one faithful Sunday school servant can make a difference to start a person on their journey of faith. One convention of faithful attendees can make a difference in the life of a weaker student. One whose faith needs strengthening encouraged to attend the Midnight Praises may praise God throughout the remainder of his life. One candle lit in a church liturgy could brighten the path of a sinner.

*“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”*

(Romans 1:17).

*St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 195) said,*

“We have discovered faith to be the first movement towards salvation. After faith, fear, hope, and repentance (accompanied by temperance and patience) lead us to love and knowledge.”

It is my prayer that through perseverance, persistence, vigilance and the Grace of God we grow and mature in faith reaping the fruits of joy and sustaining love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **A Commitment to be Lived**

▣ How can I have faith if I have not seen the Lord?

*“Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls”* (1Peter 1: 8-9).

▣ Why must I STUDY the Holy Bible to have faith?

*“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him. It you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8: 31 - 32).

▣ If my faith is weak, how do I make it stronger?

*“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10: 17).

▣ Can I be a target of Satan if steadfast in the faith?

*“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world”* (1Peter 5: 8-9).

▣ God is faithful and just to forgive me if...

*“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness ”* (1John 1: 9).

▣ What does faith have to do with « justification »?

*“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified”* (Galatians 2: 16).

▣ Should I remain faithful unto death?

*“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life”* (Revelation 2: 10).





# 8 Gentleness

## **An Essential And Pure Vessel**

**G**entleness is a fruit of the spirit, a virtue of meekness of personality, mildness in discretion, softness of manner, being amiable among friends, and sensitivity to the needs of others. A Christian's gentle approach consistently encourages good will and reinforces contentment.

St. Paul advised the early Christians *“Therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering; bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do”* (Colossians 3:12-13).

The early church fathers frequently associated the Holy Spirit with the virtue of gentleness. The Holy Spirit is of a sensitive essence, and greatly favors a gentle dwelling place that is mild, and practices moderation.

*Hermas* (c. 150) wrote,

“If you are patient, the Holy Spirit that dwells in you will be pure. He will not be darkened by any evil spirit, but, dwelling in a broad region, He will

rejoice and be glad... But, if any outburst of anger takes place, immediately the Holy Spirit, who is sensitive, is constricted. For He does not have a pure place, and He seeks to depart.”

*St. Clement of Alexandria* c. 195 addressed the gentle nature of the Holy Spirit’s descent when he wrote,

“When the Lord Jesus Christ was baptized, God assumed the likeness not of another man, but of a dove, for He wished, by a new apparition of the Spirit in the likeness of a dove, to declare His simplicity and majesty.”

The dove symbolizes many virtues. It is white denoting purity. It is a sensitive bird with the least noise causing it to quickly take flight. The dove’s break into flight is a soft feathering rippling flight with hardly a sound. It is a soft spoken bird which many attributed the dove’s song in similarity to a soft moaning. The dove does not attack other birds even when hungry, nor is it a scavenger. Doves, such as turtledoves, were often required for sacrifice such as the case of the beloved Virgin St. Mary.

*Tertullian* c. 210 wrote

“You would have been refuted in this matter by the Gospel of John when it declares that the Spirit descended in the body of a dove and sat upon the Lord. When the said Spirit was in this condition

He was as truly a dove as He was also a Spirit. Nor did He destroy His own proper substance by the assumption of an extraneous substance.”

The virtue of gentleness when abiding in a pure vessel or one that desires to be pure encourages slowness to wrath which is itself a virtue. Anger derives from retaliation and spitefulness and is often swift and deliberate. The virtue of gentleness helps develop the personality to be slow to anger and encourages the capability of calming oneself and of thinking through situations where anger has erupted. In gentleness one is taught to control their nerves and their tongue, and use wisdom in responding to angry persons and situations.

If Cain had practiced gentleness he would not have plotted to and killed his brother. Simeon and Levi would not have slain a man and hand-strung an ox. Moses would not have stuck the rock and lost the inhabitation of the Promised Land of Canaan. The harshness of anger is certain sin.

The Holy Old Testament Book of Proverbs warns, “*An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression*” (Proverbs 29:22).

St. James known as “*James the Just*” and the first bishop of Jerusalem, instructed the twelve tribes of Levi which were scattered abroad, “*So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;*” (James 1:19). St. James encouraged continual repentance, patience, gentleness, and self-control in daily living and

against the severe persecution, injustice, poverty, and other trials the new converts of the early church were combating. The early church continues to survive, thrive, and the One faith has endured through the centuries by simple adherence to the Christian virtues, faith, endurance, gentleness, kindness and good works.

Further, the blessed St. James in His Holy New Testament book further preaches and teaches that to continue in the meekness of wisdom is true wisdom. *“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy, and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy”* (James 3:13 - 17).

In the Holy Bible, the female gender is called to gentleness. Young women as well as older, in particular, are encouraged to be gentle as well as quiet in nature *“Do not let your adornment be merely outward-arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel-rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God”* (1 Peter 3:3).

Gentleness is a fruit of the spirit, in fact it is a fruit, a virtue, and essential for those whom desire to have the Holy Spirit



abide within them. Gentleness through its quietness resounds the nature of the Heavenly and saves us from sin...

*“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).*





# 9 Self-Control

## **The Virtue Among Virtues**

**W**ho ever has no rule over his own spirit Is like a city broken down, without walls (Proverbs 25:28).

The book of Proverbs 25:28 likens a man without self-control to a city broken into and left without walls. This description shows how important self-control is, since it acts like a guard to our life. As the verse says, a man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without protection, easy for thieves to break into, steal and destroy. Likewise, if we leave our soul and spirit without self-control, Satan can easily enter and spoil our lives. Self-Control is therefore important and recommended for everyone without exception or exemption regardless of gender, age or position.

### **What is Self-Control?**

**Self-Control** is dominance over all desires. It is one of the most important spiritual virtues that are essential for growth in the knowledge of God, pursuit of the Truth, and attaining of our future destiny.

### **Importance of Self-Control**

As human beings, our flesh is driven by its physical desires such as the desire for food, sex; or psychological desires such

as the love of fame, praise, to name a few. St. Paul describes the struggle to obtain and maintain these desires as an ongoing war between the flesh and the spirit which also has its desire to obtain what is beyond food and fame. When we allow our desires to control us, we become similar to animals, which are driven by their instinctive desires with neither dominance nor control. On the other hand, when we subject our flesh with all its desires to the leadership of the spirit we will have exercised what we call Self-Control which differentiates us human beings from animals.

### **Self-Control in the Chain of Virtues**

Self-Control is not attainable in isolation from other important basic Christian fundamentals. Like links in a chain, St. Peter expresses this interdependence and interrelation of virtues *“as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 1:3-8).

## • Faith

Faith is supported with **virtue**. “*Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1). God has promised us great things among which are eternal life with Him and partaking in His Divine Nature. We, through faith, look forward to the fulfillment of these promises; and while doing so, we support our faith with virtue and good deeds. For “*faith without works is dead*” (James 2:26).

## • Virtue

Virtue is supported with **knowledge**. This knowledge comprises the capacity to discern between good and bad, right and wrong. Such discernment is achieved only through knowledge of the Holy Scriptures “*Your word is a lamp to my feet*” (Psalm 119:105).

## • Knowledge

Knowledge is supported with **Self-Control**. Self-Control is necessary for the Word of God to become real and applicable in our life.

## • Self-Control

Self-Control is supported with **perseverance**. “*He who endures to the end will be saved*” (Mark 13:13). These are our Lord’s Words concerning the significance of perseverance in salvation. In order for one to control oneself and have dominance over ones desires, one needs to practice

patience and endurance without which self-control will avail nothing.

### • **Perseverance**

Perseverance is supported with **godliness**. Sufferings and hardships can never be endured without the aspiration for godliness. Why does a student endure the long hours of studying except for the love for success.

Likewise it is for the sake of godliness that we persevere in our pursuit for **self-control** which in turn supports **knowledge** which in turn supports **virtue** which in turn supports **faith**.

Mistaken are those who think of godliness as an austere, extreme style of living that does not befit existing in our physical world nor enjoying our life. Such people are cheating themselves and will end up in great sorrow. Solomon in the book of says, *“And if anyone loves righteousness, her labors are virtues; for she teaches self-control and prudence, justice and courage; nothing in life is more profitable for mortals than these”* (Wisdom 8:7). Love of righteousness will develop virtue in us which in turn will help us acquire, prudence, justice, and courage. Nothing in life is more profitable to humanity than those qualities.

### • **Godliness**

Godliness is supported with **brotherly kindness**. According to, *“Two are better than one.”* (Ecclesiastes 4:9) Fellowship in prayer, Bible study and other church activities and brotherly kindness will support our Godly life.

In the book “The Paradise of the Fathers” there is a story about a monk, a beginner in the monastic life, who wanted to live in solitude in a cave away from the monastery. His spiritual father, not in favor of the idea, asked him to dedicate a three day fast and prayer in order to know God’s will. After the three days the monk, in a vision, saw a small flame besides a pillar of fire ascending to heaven. On asking the angel, he learned that the small flame was his single prayers while the pillar was the sum prayers of the other monks put together. He then knew the power that exists in the life of brotherliness. So he learned the lesson that it was too early for him to go and live in complete solitude.

### • **Brotherly Kindness**

Brotherly Kindness is supported with *love*. Love for God and for one another. St. John states it clearly that we cannot claim to love God whom we do not see if we do not love our brother whom we see.

The martyrs offered their lives on the alter of love for Christ. In these modern days, the chance for us lies in offering the desires for an easy luxurious life on the same alter. When teaching their children Self-Control, parents should start teaching them how to love God and enter into a personal relationship with Christ before they can take leadership over their desires.

*St. Paul says, “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus*

*my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him”* (Philippians 3:7-9).

St. Paul did not care about what he had lost because he knew he had gained what is more precious and everlasting and that is Christ. It is the love of God which supports **brotherly kindness** which in turn supports **godliness** which in turn supports **perseverance** which in turn supports **self-control** which in turn supports **knowledge** which in turn supports **virtue** which in turn supports **faith**.

### **What Motivates Self-Control**

There must be a strong reason for enhancing our motivation to cultivate self-control. *“As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust”* (2 Peter 1:3-4).

That is how St. Peter in his second epistle sums up the reason for developing self-control. The cause of corruption comes from within us because of our earthly desires.

However, the cure from it lies in the love that we develop for God. We can then say that the biggest motivation to exercise self-control, which is not an easy task, is mainly love for God. If we really love God from all our heart, we will be ready to sacrifice all desires even the desire to live. An instance of



sacrificing life for the love of God is what the martyrs did and are still doing following the example of St. Paul who professed “*nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24).

The best analogy that well describes the marathon spiritual journey of a Christian is what St. Paul offers in 1 Corinthians 9, comparing a believer to an athlete who in his desire to win a race sets before his eyes a clear goal and that is *winning the race*.

To achieve that, he controls his food, sleep, and amount of exercises. While an athlete does it for a perishable crown, we as Christians have our spiritual goal for an imperishable crown. “*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown*” (1 Corinthians 9:24,25). Self-Control is clearly a prerequisite for winning that imperishable crown lest we become disqualified.

## **How to Develop Self-Control**

### **I. Submit to the Holy Spirit**

In order to develop Self-Control we have to find out about its source. Self-Control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, obtaining the former entails submission to the latter. When I submit my flesh to the spirit and my spirit to the Spirit of

God, I will have set my foot on the threshold of Self-Control. Henceforth the Holy Spirit will have leadership over my life and His fruit and actions will become mine.

That is why it is essential to let the Holy Spirit control every aspect of our lives in order that He may direct our minds and actions changing us and transforming us into the likeness of Christ. Double minded or half submission will only grieve the Holy Spirit and quench His work in us and will not lead to developing Self-Control in us.

## **2. Develop the chain of virtues**

In the chain of the eight prerequisites mentioned in 2 Peter 1:5-7, Self-Control falls predominantly at the center acting as a pivotal point for all the other Christian fundamentals which are placed in a strictly orderly, interdependent, interrelated manner. This is because our faith will not be manifested nor proved without virtue which in turn will require faith to stand before all challenges and adversities.

To exercise virtue, we need knowledge and appreciation of God's Word and His will in our lives. This knowledge is only attainable through the exercising and practicing of virtues. The most important of these virtues is self-control over our senses, habits and desires. However, Self-Control takes time and effort which is called perseverance. This perseverance however, should by no means be mere stoical endurance, but flowing from and supported by God Himself. Once God supports us, we will be in a position to achieve godliness.

Having set our foot on the road of godliness, brotherly kindness will be a by product of it and an offspring of the Love

of God which the Holy Spirit will have poured in our hearts “because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5).

Thus the chain of requirements or Christian fundamentals has no end and no beginning; for it ends where it has seemingly started and starts where it has seemingly ended with no definite end nor definite beginning.

Faith ☐☐ Virtue ☐☐ Knowledge ☐☐ Self-Control ☐☐  
Perseverance ☐☐ Godliness ☐☐ Brotherly Kindness ☐☐ Love.

### **3. Acquire Spiritual Friendship**

Spiritual friendship has its roots in brotherly kindness. When we surround ourselves with friends who have spiritual maturity, they will become a source of support and enhancement for spiritual growth and maturity. Married couples can become spiritual friends to each other so that any time any of the two weakens or falls away, the other member will help restore his/her partner.

Those who are not married can still have spiritual friends with whom they may hold prayer and fellowship meetings during which they pray, read the Holy Bible, and support each other emotionally and spiritually. St. Paul stresses the importance of spiritual friendship in Galatians 6 where he explains the importance of living by the spirit, crucifying the flesh, without self conceit, nor envy of one another. He stresses the importance of a support system; “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness” (Galatians 6:1) not neglecting the

importance of vigilance over oneself, “*considering yourself lest you also be tempted*” (Galatians 6:1).

#### **4. Set a Clear Goal**

Any successful endeavor is unequivocally preceded by a clear goal. Our Lord Jesus Christ had a clear goal before Him which was our salvation. The clarity of the goal has facilitated the means (the Cross) and procured the joyful end result expressed in His Words of triumphant accomplishment: “*It is finished*” (John 19:30).

Likewise, St. Paul had his goal clear before him: “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*” (Philippians 1:21). Not wasting his time aimlessly, and eliminating any confusing factors, he declared, “*Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air*” (1 Corinthians 9:26), until he could boldly and successfully say: “*Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness*” (2 Timothy 4:8).

#### **5. Exercise Spiritual Practices**

“*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified*” (1 Corinthians 9:27). How has St. Paul set about doing that ? By:

- **Fasting:**

Fasting is a very beneficial exercise and powerful tool for developing Self-Control. Fasting is the ability to say NO to

the desire for food. This ability will eventually develop Self-Control and strengthen the will to say NO to sin. Our Lord instituted fasting by practicing it Himself. The need for fasting is equivalent to the need for Self-Control. God does not benefit from our fasting, nor is it a law to fast. It is us who benefit from fasting.

Fasting and prayer are those which the righteous pursued and they lived in the mountains, desert and holes in the ground because of their great love for the king (Fraction of the Holy Great Fast).

Fasting should also be carried out in the proper way and not according to our convenience. When we fast according to our own rules, we are exhibiting lack of Self-Control. Three important corners of fasting are:

- (a) Abstaining for some time (at least till noon or according to the spiritual father's direction).
- (b) Controlling the quantity of food.
- (c) Controlling the quality of food

Establishing these three cornerstones of fasting will definitely lead to discipline and to bringing the body to subjection which is, in essence the core of Self-Control. Nobody is exempted from fasting except the very sick. In such cases, the church does give permission to those who cannot fast.

- **Abstention from sexual pleasures:**

St. Paul urged married people not to indulge in their marital relations during the Church fasting in order that the couple

may dedicate themselves to worship. However, St. Paul urges that abstention from marital relationship should be done under two conditions;

(a) by agreement on both sides.

(b) for sometime.

The reason for these two conditions is to not allow Satan to tempt either side because of lack of Self-Control. *“Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control”* (1 Corinthians 7:5).

- **Prostration:**

Which is an exercise of disciplining the body is also another spiritual exercise. Come let us kneel... is what we start the Prime Prayers with. Unfortunately prostration has gradually disappeared from our worship. Nonetheless bowing and kneeling to the ground is essential to practice lowliness and subjection to the Holy Spirit. Prostrating, either at the beginning of or in the midst of praying saying: God have mercy on me I am a sinner at least ten times (or according to the spiritual father's direction) is a good practice. Some people erroneously think that prostration is harmful to the back. On the contrary, it will bring about a lot of blessings and fruit of Self-Control.

- **Body posture in prayer:**

“Teach us how to stand before You at the time of praying and offer you the appropriate doxology”

Is what we ask God when we are about to pray the Midnight Prayers. Standing upright in a respectful manner is required while praying. It shows reverence and respect to the One we are praying to *“I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting”* (1 Timothy 2:8).

- **Serving others:**

*“If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all”* (Mark 9:35). This is our Lord’s precept concerning true greatness. Serving others helps reduce our self conceit, love of praise, and selfishness. We never read in the Holy Bible about our Lord being served. He said, *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve”* (Mark 10:45). Whoever wants to be Christ-like has to follow His footsteps, imitate His lifestyle and adopt His mission. Whenever it becomes difficult we need to remind ourselves of the reality that *“without Me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5).

Thus is the importance and place of **Self-Control** in the life of a Christian who has his a clear goal in life, wants to get to know and be liberated by the Truth and looks at this life as a journey that prepares for the everlasting life. Such a person will always seek to control his mind, thoughts and senses knowing that: *“Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls”* (Proverbs 25:28).



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***Bishop Youssef***

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