Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Intro

There are at least two charges that are presented to us by the Apostle Paul, both of which are challenges to our growth and development into Christlikeness. One is putting off the old self, i.e., dealing with sin in our lives. The second is putting on the new self, i.e., growing in Christian character (**Eph 4:17-24**).

"To put on the new self" is to abandon old, sinful behaviors and adopt a new identity defined by righteousness and holiness, created in the likeness of God. This process of sanctification and transformation is a conscious, ongoing process that involves renewing one's mind, rejecting deceitful desires, and actively living out our faith **(Phil 2:12-16).**

With this intentional effort toward growing in godliness, we have the fruit of the Spirit as a nine-fold list of traits that identify Christian character **(Gal 5:22-23).** There are also additional lists that are just as important to our understanding of what constitutes this type of character **(Col 3:12-16; Eph 4:2-3 and 32; James 3:17; 2 Ptr 1:5-7).**

For the purpose of our study, Godliness is more than Christian character. It covers the totality of the Christian life and provides the foundation upon which Christian character is built. It is the development of our godliness, “God-likeness”, that shapes how we live and how we are viewed **(1 Tim 4:8).**

There is no higher compliment that can be paid to a Christian than to call him or her a godly person. In light of any other accolades that could be attributed to us, none of them matter if at the same time we are not seen as godly people; for goodness’ sake **(Titus 2:11-13).**

This is why we are to train ourselves to be godly by pursuing it with unrelenting, persevering effort, not as a burden but as a privilege and a duty. This pursuit is simplified by God so that we don’t need any special talent or equipment, or any prominence or pedigree **(2 Peter 1:1-4).** The most ordinary and most talented believers are both gifted for godliness.

What then is godliness? What are the marks of a godly person? How does a person become godly? Our goal in this study is to dive deeper than just answering these questions with terms like “Godlike”, “Christlike”, and “the fruit of the Spirit”. Yes, godliness includes all of these, but it is certainly more than that.

Foundationally, godliness is *devotion in action* **(Gen 5:21-24; Heb 11:5).** From these two passages, we discover that Enoch walked with God, enjoyed a relationship with God, and pleased God. In other words, we could say he was devoted to God. This is the meaning of godliness.

The New Testament word for godliness, in its original meaning, conveys the idea of a personal attitude toward God that results in actions that are pleasing to God. This personal attitude toward God is what we call devotion to God, but it is always devotion and action.

Akin to, but different from, what we know to be our practice of scripture reading, prayer, meditation, and fasting as our daily *"devotions".* Even our daily devotions are a part of our devotion in action. But not just a rote or routine activity, it is an attitude *toward* God and is inspired *by* God.

This attitude of devotedness to God is composed of three essential elements: The fear of God. The love of God. The desire for God. All of these focus on God. Therefore, the practice of godliness is an exercise or discipline that focuses upon God, and out of this arises the character and conduct that we usually think of as godliness.

It is this God-centered devotion that we need first before trying to develop Christian character, making it nearly impossible to please God without taking the time to walk with Him and develop a relationship with Him **(Heb 11:6).** When we fear Him, love Him, and desire Him, He will then be the center-most part of our lives **(1 Cor 10:31).**

Devotion to God, then, is the mainspring of Godly character. And this devotion is the only motivation for Christian behavior that is pleasing to God. He will be at the center of our thoughts. Our most basic duties will be done to His glory. Our daily walking, talking, living will look like Him.

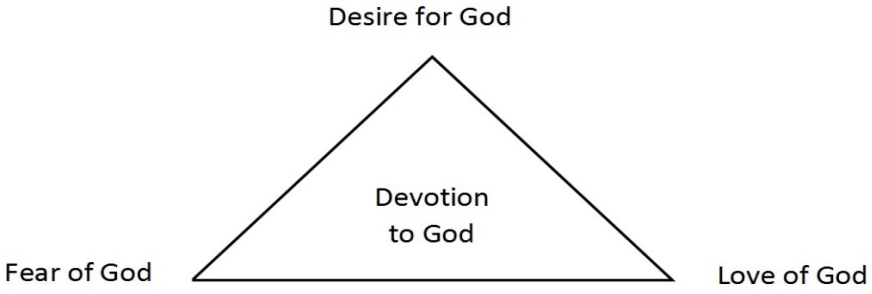
Godliness is more than Christian character; It is Christian character that springs from a devotion to God. But it is also true that devotion to God always results in godly character. Therefore, our working definition for this study is that: *Godliness is devotion to God that results in a life that is pleasing to Him* **(Col 1:9-12; Heb 13:20-21).**

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 2

We have created a working definition that: *Godliness is devotion to God that results in a life that is pleasing to Him* **(Eph 2:10 AMP).** In other words, the practice of godliness is an ever-evolving *exercise* or *discipline* that focuses on God, and out of it is developed the character and conduct that helps us to look more like Him.

The ability to wear this *garment* of godliness (**Eph 4:22-24**) is in devotion and focus on Him above all else, where He becomes the preeminent presence in our lives **(Col 1:9-18).** Our concept, or what we believe about God and our relationship with Him, will determine our approach and our conduct.

Therefore, if we desire to have a Spirit-led devotedness to God, it requires an intentional fear of God, love of God, and desire for God. Individually, the fear of God and the love of God form the foundation of true devotion to God, while the desire for God is the highest expression of that devotion.



The Fear of God:
While the fear of God may seem like an OT concept, it is as much of a truth and expectation in the NT, with some distinction **(Jer 32:40; Acts 9:31).** The OT presented it primarily as an "anxious dread", while the NT presents it as that of veneration, reverence, and awe.

Fear as anxious dread is produced by the realization of God's impending judgment on sin **(Gen 3:10)** and rightly so, particularly for the unsaved. As believers, we have been delivered from the fear of the wrath of God **(1 Jn 4:17-19)**, though we are still subject to the discipline of God for our sinful ways, in which we still fear God **(Phil 2:12-13).**

This fear is the soul of godliness. It is the attitude that elicits from our hearts adoration and love, reverence and honor. For the saved, it focuses not on the wrath of God but upon the majesty, holiness, and transcendent glory of God **(Is 6:1-5; Mt 17:1-8).** It is impossible to be devoted to God if our hearts aren't filled with a reverential fear of God.

We have to see Him first in His transcendent glory, majesty, and holiness before we see Him in His love, mercy, and grace. In the heart of the godly, there is a healthy tension that exists between the reverential awe of God and his glory and the childlike confidence in God as a heavenly father.

Without this tension, a Christian's childlike confidence can easily degenerate into a presumption that God's love makes all things permissible. This is how we end up with a lack of seriousness in our approach to the throne in prayer, our public presentation of God, and our light and trite embrace of the things of God.

Much to its demise, modern-day Christianity dishonorably magnifies the love of God almost to the exclusion of the fear of God: God is not only love **(1 Jn 4:8),** He is also Holy **(1 Ptr 1:16).** We need not preach fire and brimstone as an awakening to the love of God, but neither should we look for His love so much that we ignore His law and precept.

In other words, we should magnify the love of God, and although we bask in His love and mercy, we must never lose sight of His Majesty and His Holiness. This is why a "right concept" of God is so essential. It underpins and shapes our theology, daily actions, and relationship with the divine.

To fear God is to confess His absolute uniqueness **(Ex 15:11)**; To acknowledge His Majesty, holiness, awesomeness, glory, and power. Along with this confession comes a healthy fear that helps to regulate our conduct **(Deut 6:2).** When we begin perceiving God as these things, our worship will begin to determine our behavior.

The fear of God should provide a primary motivation for, as well as result in, obedience to him. If we truly reverence God, we will obey him, since every act of disobedience is an offense to his dignity and His Majesty. It shows that we are, intentionally or unintentionally, dismissive of His person, character, will, and word.

The essential ingredients of the fear of God are correct concepts of the character of God, a pervasive sense of the presence of God, and a constant awareness of our obligation to God.
-Rev Albert N Martin, The Fear of God.

Questions:

1. **In what way do you think you may have conflated or misaligned the fear of God and the love of God? How can a new understanding of the distinction between the two help you appropriate them?**

2. **A good way to make your study of godliness practical is to plan specific applications you can make in your daily speech, attitudes, and behavior. Take a moment to think out and write down some applications of godliness that can challenge you this week. Then consider which scripture passage is used in this study would be helpful to keep in mind for these applications.**

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 3

Three things are essential for a life of devotion to God that bears the fruit of godliness; a life that is pleasing to Him. Of these three, *the fear of God* and *the love of God* form a foundational necessity that gives support and motivation towards the third, *a desire for God.*

We've discovered that the fear of God, for the believer, is not the "anxious dread" that it once was in the ancient OT history of Israel. In contrast, the unbeliever should be afraid of the judgment and wrath of God **(Jn 3:36; Rom 5:8-9).** The fear of God, for the believer, is a reverential "fear" that is inspired by the majesty and holiness of God.

It's in this embrace of a healthy fear and reverence for the person and character of God that we begin to understand, accept, and share in the love of God. Understanding it means that we don't bring our own definition to it. Accepting it means that we don't try to change it to suit ourselves. Sharing it means exuding it in its truest sense.

The Love of God:
Only the "God-fearing" Christian can truly appreciate the love of God as that which bridged the gap (chasm) between a Holy God and a sinful creature. It is out of this reverence for His uniqueness that love is born. While His love is multi-faceted, all acts of His love come secondary to sending His Son to die for our sins **(1 Jn 4:9-10).**

Part of our pursuit of godliness is never forgetting that we were at one time objects of His wrath and are now His beloved children of light **(Eph 5:8).** This is only because of the cross of Calvary and its display being the ultimate expression of God's love. Jesus did not die just for us to have peace and purpose in life, but to save us from the wrath of God.

In a slight conundrum, the more we understand being rescued from His wrath, the more we can appreciate His love, and the deeper our perception of God's love to us in Christ, the more profound our reverence and awe **(Ps 130:3-4).** In our practice of godliness, then, we must seek to grow both in the fear of God and in an ever-increasing comprehension of the love of God.

As a challenge, this awareness of God's love for us in Christ must be *personalized* in order for it to become one of the solid "foundational corners" of our triangle of devotion to God. It is not enough to believe that God loved the world; we must be gripped by the realization that God loves me, specifically as an individual.

There's more to it than an idea that God's love is a giant umbrella covering all of those who seek to find safety and refuge beneath it. God's love is that large in a sense, but it is also so minute and specific that it finds itself meeting the very smallest and seemingly insignificant details of our very lives **(Mt 10:27-31).**

The uniqueness of God's love is that He can know us in every aspect of our person, sinfulness included and still love us (**1 Tim 1:12-17).** Like Paul, the more we understand our unreservedness, the more we should be grateful and find ourselves growing in adoration and devotion.

If God's love for us is to be a solid foundation stone of devotion, we must realize that his love is entirely of grace and it only rests upon the work of Jesus Christ, then flows to us because of our being in Him. This is the only reason His love can never change, regardless of what we do.

God's love is unconditional, despite our spiritual ups and downs, sin, failure, discouragement, and our inability to make us question it. As difficult as it is to believe, God's love for us does not fluctuate according to our experience with it. His love is both the initiator and the sustainer (**1 Jn 4:19; Rom 8:35-39**).

An awareness of His love should stimulate in us an increased devotion to Him. And this devotion is active; it's not just a warm, affectionate feeling toward Him. It's godliness. Christ's love for us should *compel* us to abandon living for self and embrace the blessedness of living for Him (**2 Cor 5:14-15**).

Devotion to God begins with the fear of God, a biblical view of His majesty and holiness that elicits a reverence and awe of Him. The fear of God leads naturally to an apprehension of the love of God shown in Jesus Christ. As we increasingly contemplate God in His majesty, holiness, and love, we will be progressively led to the apex of the triangle of devotion: the desire for God.

O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be! Let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love; here's my heart;
O take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above.

- Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 4

Our newly explored definition of godliness has given us some metrics by which we can consider for ourselves how godly we truly are. Not with a mere "form of godliness", but with a genuine measurable standard of attitudes, actions, and activities that determine how near or far we are from this ever-evolving pursuit **(2 Tim 3:1-7).**

The first of these measurables is the fear of God, which we have determined is, as believers, awe and reverence over and against, as non-believers, anxious dread. The second of these measurables is the love of God; how we understand it, how we receive it, and how we share it.

A Desire for God: Is the third measurable that becomes the pinnacle of our consideration of, *and* self-examination for, the concept of genuine godliness. Once we understand it, this measure is one that we can only gauge for ourselves, as a matter of our own heart's desire.

When the three come together, true godliness engages our affections and awakens within us a desire to enjoy God's presence and fellowship. It produces a longing for God himself. This alone can be what helps us determine the depth of our pursuit of godliness **(Ps 27:4; 42:1-2).**

As an example, the psalmist creates for us a standard of intensity for our desire for God's presence and fellowship that begs us to question our own. How much do we long for His presence? How much do we desire to be in fellowship with Him? Do we have a thirst to be with Him?

David enjoyed dwelling upon the majesty and greatness, the holiness and goodness, of God. But David did more than contemplate the beauty of God's attributes. He sought God himself **(Ps 63:1).** The Apostle Paul *matured,* after a true encounter with Jesus, into the same kind of desire **(Phil 3:7-11).**

This is how we take the pulse and heartbeat of the godly person. It is to be satisfied with God alone, but to never be satisfied with the present experience of God. For the godly, there is always a yearning for more, far beyond a casual desire; an overwhelming need for more of Him.

While this may seem more mystical than practical, it's not. It simply takes us beyond the casual thought of serving God, being busy doing his work, and even beyond some of our devotional practices. It is the desire to simply, yet profoundly, want to be with Him, wherever He is, in whatever He's doing **(Lk 10:38-42).**

It's discovering and acknowledging our inadequacy and insufficiency in and of ourselves and shifting our life's focus to our reliance upon God. Like a physically thirsty person who

needs water, or a hungry person who needs food, this spiritual thirst arises from a recognition of our dependence on God (Especially those who believe Him to be able).

This is imperative for our understanding of God's ways and why He allows us to experience dry, barren, dark, oppressive seasons. It is our experienced lack of what we really need that makes us really desire what we really need. This is why we shouldn't shun barren places and dry spells: they teach us both to want most and to seek most what we need most.

The Bible indicates from the beginning to the end, and for all eternity, that fellowship with God is God's plan for us; from "Adam where art thou" to "I stand at the door and knock" **(Gen 3:9; Rev 3:20).** His goal for us then, is that we are sanctified and mature to a state stage where we desire for ourselves the same thing that He desires for us **(Ps 37:4).**

To know that God has planted a desire and yearning for Him in our hearts produces and exudes an aura of warmth. It is the complete opposite of the cold and callous "form of godliness" that comes from a false sense of legalistic morality. Authentic godliness is warm and inviting, never cold and offensive.

This longing for God also produces a desire to glorify Him and please Him **(Is 26:8-9).** It is nearly impossible to separate our desire for God Himself and a desire for His glory. These two go hand in hand. The more we desire to be with Him, the more we will glorify Him. The more He is glorified, the more we will long to be with Him.

This is devotion to God; The fear of God, which is out of reverence and awe, veneration and honor toward him, married to an embrace deep within our souls of the love of God for us, demonstrated by Christ on Calvary. These two attitudes complement and support each other, producing within our souls a deep longing for the one who is awesome in splendor.

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 5

But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise (train) yourself toward godliness. 8 For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come **(1 Tim 4:7-8).**

Much of what we have discovered thus far about godliness has been in principle, and our progress in them is possible. So, much more than just concepts or ideals is the need to put them to work so that they can have an effect on our lives. Just as the body needs to be exercised or trained to perform at optimal levels, our Spirit does even more so.

Particularly because our spiritual well-being, health, and wellness are often what determine our mental, emotional, physical, and even financial well-being. The unfortunate ignorance of many is assuming that our physical life will ever shape our spiritual life or that what we do outwardly will transform us inwardly.

Spiritual development and physical development share some similarities. With each, growth only comes with exertion and proper feeding. The Apostle Paul teaches Timothy that the same work and commitment that others put towards physical exercise should be put towards the pursuit of godliness.

There are several principles attached to the command to train or exercise ourselves toward godliness. The first is *personal responsibility*. As much as we would love for God to deposit or download godliness into us, it is ours to work out through confidence in His divine enablement **(Phil 2:12-13).**

Like any other endeavor that we are industrious with, we have to create a discipline, both intentional and regimented, around our growth in godliness. It is ours to pursue and to labor towards with the aid and assistance of the Holy Spirit, who is simultaneously working on the inside to help us in sanctification **(1 Thess 5:23).**

The second principle is that *the object of this training is growth* in our personal spiritual life. Yes, we are to progress in ministry and service to others. But the ultimate goal is to grow in the fear of God, the comprehension of the love of God, and the desire for the presence and fellowship of God. It's then that ministry and service become second nature.

As the Apostle Paul compares physical training with training in godliness, the third principle is the *importance of minimum characteristics.* As with any training, exercise, or discipline, there are certain basic essentials, or bare minimums, that are associated with every practice.

The first of these undeniable minimums is *commitment.* Occurring repeatedly throughout scripture, there is an expectation that commitment is a driving force behind our pursuit of

God and godliness (**Ps 63:1; Jer 29:13; Phil 3:12; Heb 12:14; 2 Ptr 1:5-7**). There is a price to godliness, and it never goes on sale. It never comes cheaply or easily.

No one ever becomes godly without a commitment to pay the price of the daily spiritual training God has designed for our growth in godliness. The deliberate use of the verb exercise or train, gymnazō (GR), implies persevering, painstaking, diligent effort.

The second undeniable, irreducible minimum is a *competent teacher.* A competent teacher coaches, encourages, corrects, and helps maintain the highest standard. This is what the Holy Spirit does for us (**Jn 14:16-17, 14:26**). He teaches, trains, rebukes, corrects, and encourages us through His Word.

We simply can't grow in godliness without the knowledge of truth that comes from the teaching of the Word (**Titus 1:1**). This is not just the academic knowledge of Bible facts (**1 Cor 8:1-2**); it is spiritual knowledge taught by the Holy Spirit as He applies the truth of God to our hearts (**Lk 24:27, 32**).

The third minimum in the training process is *practice.* Practice is what puts feet to the commitment and applies the teaching of the coach or trainer, for which there is no shortcuts. Practice is where the skill is developed. The practice of godliness is what enables us to become godly Christians.

It is repeatedly agreeing with the Holy Spirit and attempting to *work out* the information, lessons, and wisdom with regularity and consistency. Studying, praying over the principles, and asking the Holy Spirit to apply them in our lives is the practice of godliness that becomes great gain.

(To be Continued)…

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 6

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth **(Jn 1:14).**

Godliness as a defining characteristic of believers is attainable as we grow and mature in Christ. It doesn't happen overnight. It is a process that requires intentionality. The process consists of several minimal characteristics: commitment, yieldedness to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, practice, and time in the Word of God.

While all of these are certainly essential, it is the time we spend in/with the Word of God that is most transformative, from its initiating our faith to its refining our faith **(Rom 10:14-17; 2 Tim 3:16-17).** The word of God is the primary source for spiritual nourishment, transformation, and guidance.

As essential food for spiritual growth, it provides nourishment and strength. The word of God is described, both for new and mature Christians. As a tool for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, it transforms the mind (thoughts) and life (actions): it leads to a transformation of thoughts and actions.

As a source of revelation, it divulges God's will, His character, and His purpose and desire for the lives of His people. As a "lamp for my feet, and a light to my path," the Word of God provides wisdom, guidance, and instruction on how to live lives that are pleasing to Him.

When it comes to godliness, a prominent practice will be our time in the Word of God, and how we spend it varies according to the method of intake. These five methods of intake are important for growing in godliness: hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating.

The most common method of scriptural intake is ***hearing the Word*** of God taught by pastors and teachers. Unfortunately, this is a lightly regarded method by many who view it as somewhat ineffective based on personality-driven ministry.

Too often, we listen to be entertained instead of instructed, to be moved emotionally rather than moved to obedience. We are to hear and apply it to our lives (Ezek 33:30-33; Rev 1:3). The type of hearing God commends is with eagerness of both exploration and application (Acts 17:11; James 1:22-25).

The second method of scriptural intake is ***reading the Word*** for ourselves. This is the opportunity to learn directly from the Master Teacher Himself, the Holy Spirit. This is one of the ways that God speaks to us, teaches us, and reveals Himself to us directly as if we were speaking face to face **(Ex 33:11).**

Reading the word for ourselves helps us gain an overall perspective of the Bible. This can be done at length, with an approach that helps us understand the entirety of the scriptures as the history of Christianity, the whole counsel of God, and the plan and purpose of God as a whole (Acts 20:27).

The third method of scriptural intake is ***studying the Word.*** Reading the Word gives us breadth, but studying the Word gives us depth. This method requires greater diligence and mental intensity for analyzing a passage, comparing scripture with scripture, asking questions, making observations, and organizing the fruit of our study.

Every Christian, especially those pursuing godliness, should be a student of the Bible. Our growth and maturation can be weighed upon the scales of our scriptural diet **(Heb 5:12-14).** If the practice of godliness is important to us, we will create time for this level of engagement with the Word of God, i.e., commitment.

Bible *study* requires teachability to accept what we study, intention to obey it, mental discipline to apply it, prayerful dependence for help with it, and diligence to keep searching through it as for a hidden treasure **(Prov 2:1-5).** The result of these principles is the growth and development of godly character and living **(Vs. 5).**

The fourth method of scriptural intake is ***memorization of the Word.*** This storing of the Word enables us to grow in every area of our lives. Specifically, for our practice of godliness, it enables us to grow in our devotion to God and in the Godlike character that makes our lives pleasing to Him **(Psalm 119:11; Prov 7:1, 10:14; Jn 14:26).**

The fifth method of scriptural intake is ***meditation on the Word.*** In the OT, the word meditate means to murmur or to mutter, which in essence means to rehearse or recite as if talking to oneself. Meditating on the scriptures is like talking to ourselves about them, turning over in our minds the meanings, implications, and applications to our own lives.

This too is a command of God for godliness **(Josh 1:8; Ps 1:2).** Memorization is the first step toward meditation. Meditation takes the scriptures from mere memorization in the mind to application in our hearts. It opens our understanding, engages our affections, and addresses our wills.

Communion with God is the result of walking with him. His word is absolutely necessary and central to our communion with him. Pleasing God requires knowing his will; How he wants us to live, what he wants us to do. His word is the only means by which he communicates that will to us. It is impossible to practice godliness without a constant, consistent, and balanced intake of the word of God in our lives.

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 7

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience **(Col 3:12).**

While all authentic Christians have a basic God-centeredness as an elemental part of our spiritual lives, we must grow in this devotion to God. This is why training ourselves to be godly is necessary; We have to make every effort to add godliness to our faith by growing both in our devotion to God and in our likeness to his character.

A crucial aspect of our growth in godliness must be a balanced approach to all three of the essential elements of devotion: fear, love, and desire. The labor of commitment, yieldedness to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, practice, and time in the Word of God only accent the work of the Holy Spirit to bring about our growth **(1 Cor 3:7).**

One of the ways to Express this vital dependence on God is by praying that *He* will *cause* us to grow in our devotion to Him **(Ps 51:10, 86:11; Eph 3:16-19).** Being committed to the practice of godliness, is reflected in our prayer life by our regularly asking God to increase our fear of Him, to deepen our understanding of His love for us, and to heighten our desire for His fellowship.

Upon His granting of our petitions, the ultimate test of our growth is much more than our activity; it's in our attitude of life. Obedience to the will of God is the ultimate test of our fear of God and the only true response to His love for us. God specifically states that we fear Him by keeping all of His decrees and commands **(Deut 6:1-3; Jn 14:15, 15;10).**

We can truly know if we fear God by determining if we have an earnest desire to obey His commands, to love what He loves, and to hate what He hates. Thusly, walking in the fear of God is equated with obedience to God and the measure of our obedience is an exact measure of our reverence for Him.

This is why God often reveals our own sinfulness to us as a means of answering our prayer for a deeper realization of His love. He reveals this to us so that we have an opportunity to acknowledge, repent, and be restored. Both the fear and the love of God motivate us to obedience, and that obedience proves that they are both at work in our lives.

Obedience is ultimately what helps us live a life of godly character and conduct. It's built on the inward foundation of devotion to God. It is the total opposite of the outward structure of character and conduct that breeds a cold morality, legalism, self-righteousness, and spiritual pride **(Mt 23:23-27).**

Taking on God's character comes from a hearts disposition that is devoted to doing *what* He says and doing *as* He does **(1 Sam 15:22; Eph 5:1-2).** This level of godliness consists of

two distinct but complementary traits, and both must be pursued equally: God-centeredness and Godlikeness.

When it comes to Godlikeness, a good place to start, but not be limited to, is the list of gracious qualities known as the fruit of the Spirit **(Gal 5:22-23).** To this list, the scriptures encourage us to add other traits like Holiness, humility, compassion, forbearance, contentment, thankfulness, considerateness, sincerity, and perseverance.

While these two lists may seem insurmountable in our own strength, we have to remember that each of these, individually and collectively, are the result of His work in us. This does not free us from our responsibility for the development of our Christian character, but instead that we fulfill our responsibility by his direction and by his enablement.

The first of several (6) basic principles that apply to all aspects of godly character is, ***Devotion to God is the only acceptable motive for actions that are pleasing to God.*** In other words, motives matter. Most of our motivations in this day and age are self-centered and or reward-based, where we pursue God for our own interests.

The pursuit of godliness and godly character must always have at its core the desire to live pleasing to God. When we are considering our actions, our forgiving, our serving, our witnessing, our giving, our testifying, we have to check even these virtuous things against our motives behind them.

Whether we walk in godly character to maintain our reputation before others, we want to feel good about ourselves, we want to arouse God's blessing, we want to live up to our upbringing, or we even fear being the recipients of God's discipline, even these motives don't have pleasing God at the center **(Gen 39:9).**

Take caution that unchecked and unsurrendered motives can expose the nature of true character. Ill motives will always expose ill character. We often need to be aware of our motives because our motives are attached to our character, and our character needs to be aligned with a devotion to pleasing God and being more like Him.

All of our actions, to be acceptable to God, must be done out of a sense of devotion to God, and what we are devoted to will be what motivates us the most **(Col 3:23).**

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 8

The goal of Godliness: For Goodness Sake is to grow and mature into individuals that live lives reverencing, loving, and desiring God **(Phil 3:12-14).** For everyone who sees this as our aim, it should eventuate in our developing a lifestyle of godliness that is not subjective, fickle, or fabricated.

Adding to the fruit, or characteristics, of the Spirit, which are holiness, humility, compassion, contentment, considerateness, sincerity, perseverance, etc., gives us great descriptors of Godliness or Godly character. Each of these, individually, even more so collectively, are attributed to an action that is pleasing to God.

This is all doable and manageable because our essential responsibility is to yield to the Spirit's work on us, in us, and through us. He does the transforming. As we partner in this process of sanctification, devotion to the Word, choosing obedience, and practicing godliness, there are several overarching principles that apply to all aspects of godliness.

The first of these, as previously discussed, is that ***devotion to God is the only acceptable motive for actions that are pleasing to God.*** Motives matter, in that the reason behind our attempts at growing in godliness should always be by our devotion to Him and not any other personalized or self-aggrandizing agendas **(Col 3:23-24).**

The second principle of godly character is: *The power or enablement for a godly life comes from the risen Christ.* While our efforts are ours to employ and our salvation is ours to work out with fear and trembling **(Phil 2:12-13)**, our spiritual strength and accomplishments are only by the Lord's power and enablement **(2 Cor 3:5; Col 1:29; Phil 4:13).**

So, as the source of power for godliness is Christ, so the means of experiencing that power is through relationship with Him **(Jn 15:4-5).** Only by abiding in Him can we bring forth the fruit of godly character. This is what the Apostle Paul calls "living in Christ" **(Col 2:6-7).**

"To abide in Me' expresses the continual act by which the Christian sets aside everything which he might derive from his own wisdom, strength, merit, to draw all from."
-Frederic Louis Godet, *Swiss theologian.*

In other words, we have to set aside any dependence upon our human wisdom and strength of character and draw all that we need from Christ through faith in him. This is the abandoning of self and self-sufficiency for a dependence on the one who is all-sufficient at being and doing any and everything we need **(2 Cor 3:5, 9:8; Col 1:9-12, 2:9-10).**

This relationship is also maintained by beholding the glory of Christ in His word **(2 Cor 3:18).** This "beholding the glory is more than just considering His humanity in the Gospels; It is observing and embracing His character, His attributes, and His will, and as we do so,

we are transformed more and more into His likeness.

The third principle of godly character is: ***though the power for godly character comes from Christ, the responsibility for developing and displaying that character is ours.*** This is one of the most difficult to apply because we vacillate between attempts and going at it all in our own strength and, in the futility of that, relinquishing all responsibility to Christ.

The challenge is finding the balance of both total responsibility and total dependence in all aspects of our Christian journey. This often requires an intense effort to do the things that God holds us responsible for against the resistance that comes from without and from within **(Phil 3:12-14).**

The conundrum is that we still must be dependent upon our relationship with Him, as it is what ultimately enables and empowers us to maintain our sense of and attempts at responsibility as Christians. We are empowering to and responsible for training ourselves in and pursuing godliness **(1 Tim 4:7).**

"The believer is called to self-activity, to the active pursuit of the will of God, to the promotion of the spiritual life in himself, to the realization of the virtues of the Christian life, and to a personal application of salvation". **-Jac J. Muller**

This is not to leave us to our own devices, to our own strength of character, or to our own willpower. It is to keep us involved in our own sanctification and development in godliness. The spiritual power that enables us to apply ourselves to the cultivation and development of Christian graces is of God, who works in us to both will and to do.

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 9

These several (6) basic principles that apply to all aspects of godly character began with, *Devotion to God is the only acceptable motive for actions that Him.* Followed by, *the power or enablement for a godly life comes from Him.* And then, *though the power for godly character comes from Christ, it's our responsibility to develop and display it.*

To bring a conclusion to these basic principles, we have to consider the fourth: *The development of godly character entails putting off and putting on character traits.* This is directly attached to our responsibility as our intentional participation in the process of sanctification **(Eph 4:22-24).**

For every vice that we are to take off, there is a virtue to replace it with **(Eph 4:28-5:4).** Even the fruit of the spirit **(Gal 5:22-23)** is set in contrast to a lengthy list of vices of the sinful nature that must be put off by the godly person. This is the epitome of growing to love what He loves and hate what He hates **(Heb 1:9; Rom 12:9).**

Just as we need to create a balance between personal responsibility and total dependence, we also need to seek the balance of scripture and putting off and putting on. Even when helping others, it's not just about helping them put off the bad habits. It's also about helping them be restored to putting on the good habits **(Rom 15:1; Gal 6:1).**

The fifth principle of godly character is that *we are to pursue in all of the graces that are considered the fruit of the Spirit* **(Gal 5:22-23).** Godly character is, and must become, balanced. There should be an equal emphasis on the entire spectrum of graces set forth in scripture as characteristics of the godly person.

Because the fruit of the spirit is not a matter of temperament, we cannot only emphasize in our lives those traits that seem most natural to us, while neglecting those that don't. While some traits are more difficult to grow in than others, we do not get to avoid the difficult ones or the ones we don't like.

"That's just the way that I am", can never be the excuse for embracing or neglecting favorable or challenging traits. All of them should be subject to the development under the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit. Some may require more prayer and attention on our part, but that is the price we must pay to grow in Godlikeness.

Finally, the sixth principle of godly character is that *growth in all areas is progressive and never finished.* As much as we would love to think so, our being perfected doesn't come to fruition in this life. There is a great and grave danger in thinking that there is ever an area or aspect of godliness that we no longer need cultivation **(Phil 3:12).**

Even in the areas that we have grown, there is always a need for further growth. Growth in godly character is not only progressive and always unfinished, but also absolutely

necessary for spiritual survival (**Ps 27:4**). If we are not growing, we are regressing; as it pertains to growth in the spiritual life, we never stand still. We are always growing in one direction or another.

Are we growing toward godly character or ungodly character? In love or selfishness; harshness or patience; greed or generosity; honesty or dishonesty; purity or impurity. Every day we are training ourselves in one direction or the other by the thoughts we think, the words we say, the actions we take, the deeds we do (**Rom 6:15-19**).

The relationship between conduct and character is an intimate one. In the form of repeated actions over time, conduct produces character. But it is also true that character determines actions. What we do, we become. What we are, we do. This circular truth reveals that conduct is always feeding character, but character is also always feeding conduct.

For this reason, it is vitally important- extremely necessary- that we practice godliness every day (**2 Peter 1:5-6**). We can't afford to have any letup in our pursuit of godly character. Every day that we are not practicing godliness, we are subjecting ourselves to being conformed to the world of ungodliness around us.

This is why it is essential that we are led by the Spirit, not just in some decision we must make, but in the conduct and character issues of our lives (**Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18**). If we are led by the Spirit, we will put to death the misdeeds of the body and we will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature (**Rom 8:13**).

In addition to these general principles, ask the Holy Spirit to impress upon your mind the two or three traits of godly character He wants you to work on and pray about now. Concentrate on these. He will then lead you to work on others. He is in charge of our growth and godly character; He is our teacher and coach and will never lead us in a way that will overwhelm or confuse us.

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 10

As an ever-evolving *exercise* or *discipline*, the practice of godliness develops character and conduct that helps us to look more like Him. Considering the fact that *Godliness is devotion to God that results in a life that is pleasing to Him,* we must explore the traits and behaviors that He expects from us.

While devotion to God is the first aspect of godliness and Godlike character being the second, the first of these several Godlike traits is humility. It is questionable to consider whether humility is Godlike, but there is no question that God commends humility and delights in it in us (**Is 57:15, 66:1-2**).

During His earthly journey, God in the Son, a simplified humility in its utmost form through His death for us (**Phil 2:8**). He was born in the humblest of circumstances, was obedient to his earthly parents, presented Himself as one who was "gentle and lowly", washed his disciples' feet, and even taught, "he who humbles himself will be exalted"

With Him as the supreme example and standard of humility, we are to be imitators of Him as He lived out His earthly life (**1 Jn 2:6**). Therefore, even if we question whether humility is technically a *Godlike* trait, we certainly cannot question that it is a *Christlike* trait.

Specifically, since the promises of God toward the truly humble are amazing; He promises to dwell with them, to esteem them, to give them grace, to lift them up, and to exalt them (**Is 57:15; Is 66:2; James 4:6; 1 Ptr 5:6; Lk 18:14**). Humility opens the way to all other godly character traits and is the soil in which the other traits of the fruit of the Spirit grow.

Humility is manifested in our relationships with God, ourselves, and others. We are to be humble toward God and His word, in regard to our trials or blessings that come our way, or abilities and successes with which we are blessed, and toward other people.

Humility toward God is closely akin to the fear of God: It begins with a high view of God's person. As we see God in His majesty, awesomeness, and holiness, we are humbled before Him (**Is 6:5**). Because humility before God is basic to all our relationships, we cannot be humble in them until we are humble toward Him.

To be truly humble before God is also to be humble before His word (**Is 66:2**). As we searched the scriptures, we must allow them to search us, to sit in judgment upon our character and conduct. We must treat the scriptures not only as a source of knowledge about God but also as the expression of his will for our daily lives.

Much more than just reading scriptures to increase our knowledge of the facts of the Bible, we need to increase our spiritual knowledge for the purpose of obeying God's will (**Col 1:9-12**). Humility unto the word of God is our willingness to let it lead and guide us, whether we agree and find it comfortable or not.

When a believer is truly humble before God and His word, he will also be humble about his own gifts, abilities, and attainments. When we understand our personal salvation, we will realize and gratefully acknowledge that all that we are and all that we have comes from the hand of God **(Eph 2:8, 1 Tim 1:15).**

Our attitude of humility in regard to our salvation should carry over to a recognition that any of our abilities and achievements are equally a result of God's grace. Every ability and every advantage we have comes from God and has been given to us as a stewardship to be used in serving Him **(1 Cor 4:7, 15:10).**

Humility with regard to ourselves consists in ascribing all that we have and all that we have accomplished to the God who gives us grace. Whether they are secular or spiritual in nature, from our natural labors or spiritually empowered, the glory all goes to Him, for His grace and by His grace **(Deut 8:17-18; 1 Cor 3:7; Is 26:12).**

Another way that humility expresses itself is in mutual submission to one another **(Eph 5:21; 1 Ptr 5:5; James 3:17).** In this vain, Humility is expressed in the capacity to submit to instruction as well as correction from other believers; to be teachable or to be humble enough to admit we have erred when another believer corrects us.

There is no question that submission to the unsolicited teaching or correction of others is difficult for our naturally proud hearts. But humility is a fruit of the Spirit, the result of His ministry in our hearts. He does not make us humble; He enables us to humble ourselves in these difficult situations.

Submission to one another may be difficult, but for some, it is closely comparable to the difficulty of serving one another. Of course, Jesus is the teacher and pacesetter when it comes to serving others **(Mt 20:20-28; Jn 13:13-17).** Even the demonstration of humility in serving others requires the grace of God **(1 Ptr 4:11).**

Additionally, we can demonstrate humility by honoring one another **(Rom 12:10; Phil 2:3).** This is also challenging at times because it really calls for us to place the other person above or ahead of ourselves in matters of position, concerns, or needs, and unfortunately, we are by nature a “me first” culture and society.

If we are to experience the blessings promised to the humble, we must work out this humility in our daily relationships with others. We must learn to submit to one another, serve one another, and honor or prefer one another above ourselves. We must learn humility just as the apostle Paul said he learned contentment **(Phil 4:11-13).**

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 11

Closely akin to the level of priority that humility holds, is the need for godly person to have a spirit of contentment. Contentment is one of the most distinguishing traits of the godly person because a godly person has his heart focused on God rather than on possessions or position or power or prominence.

To be clear, contentment in general or from a biblical perspective does not mean the absence of ambition. It is peace within ambition. A content Christian can still dream and build, yet remains steady when plans shift or outcomes disappoint. Contentment does not dilute ambition but sanctifies it.

In the Bible, contentment is an ever-growing, ever-evolving temperament developed by the Holy Spirit. It is an inward, settled state of spiritual satisfaction and peace, independent of external circumstances, rooted in a deep trust in God's sovereignty, goodness, and provision.

Unlike the cultural bend toward self-sufficiency, for the believer, it's a learned virtue, a joyful and intentional submission to God's will, that enables believers to abound with joy and steadfastness whether they have plenty or are in need, finding sufficiency in Christ **(Phil 4:11-13).**

The words “content” or “contentment” actually mean “sufficiency” **(1 Tim 6:6; 2 Cor 9:8, 12:9).** They can also be translated to mean “satisfied” **(Lk 3:14; 1 Tim 6:8; Heb 13:5).** This speaks to the idea that we are not to be anxious or worry, which is the exact opposite.

To worry means we do not trust God. The key to overcoming our discontentment and lack of faith is to find out who God really is and how He has been faithful to supply the needs of His people in the past. The study of such will grow our confidence and trust for the future.

The contented person experiences the sufficiency of God's provision for his needs and the sufficiency of God's grace for his circumstances. Believing that God will indeed meet all his material needs and that he will work in all his circumstances for his good. He finds satisfaction and rest inwardly.

There are three areas that the idea of biblical contentment is associated with and require our practice. Primarily possessions or money. Second, our place in society or in the body of Christ. Third, the providence of God in our circumstances, ie. Living situations, hardships, trials, persecutions, etc..

It must be practiced as an aspect of godliness because one of the tricks of the enemy is to try and lead us into a life of discontent, which is typically based upon his lies and manipulations **(Gen 3:1-6; Mt 4;1-11).** In essence, discontent is a questioning of the goodness of God.

Discontent is one of the most satanic sins of all, and to indulge in it is to rebel against God just as Satan did (**Is 14:13-15**). It is a dissatisfaction with God's provision, stemming from unbelief, comparison, and a desire for more than what God has given, leading to sin like grumbling, envy, and rebellion.

Scripture both warns us of the dangers of discontent and encourages us to pursue contentment on the basis of God's promise to provide for us **(Lk 12:15; 1 Tim 6:6-11; Heb 13:5).** Consider that contentment is important enough that God included a law against covetousness with the more offensive sins of murder, stealing, and adultery.

God's attitude toward discontentment has not changed, and the spiritual danger of loving the things of this world is far more dangerous than we'd imagine **(1 Jn 2:15-17).** This is why contentment is not a spiritual luxury, but is absolutely vital to our spiritual well-being and growth.

The truth is that we as Christians are not immune to the frustrating, irritating, disappointing and often overwhelming life circumstances. And yet, we believe that even in these we are still a working part of the will of an all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving God and heavenly Father.

We can find contentment when we accept that our lot, whatever it may be, is under the providence of God; under God's care and control of the universe **(Ps 33:10-11).** And when they do not feel like they are under His care and control, it's then that our faith must lean on His goodness so we may continue in our godliness **(Is 55:8-9; Jer 29:11).**

In every area that we are called upon to be content, whether possessions, position or the providence of God, the grace of God is the ultimate solution for our discontent **(2 Cor 12:7-10).** Understanding grace as His unmerited favor through Christ and His divine assistance through the Holy Spirit is essential.

Then contentment becomes the realization that whatever our situation might become it is far better than we deserve. And secondly that however difficult and frustrating our circumstances might be, God's divine assistance through the Holy Spirit is available to help us respond in a godly manner and be content.

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 12

When we consider godliness there are virtues of Christian character, such as holiness, love, and faithfulness that are godly traits because they reflect the character of God and are imitable. These are those that He expects us to see in His self-revelation and "go and do likewise" **(Eph 5:1).**

There are also some virtues that are godly traits because they acknowledge and exalt His character; God centered qualities that enhance our devotion to Him. These are the virtues like humility, contentment, and thankfulness. In humility we acknowledge His majesty, in contentment His grace, and in thankfulness His goodness.

Thankfulness is considered a fundamental aspect of godliness and a defining characteristic of a vibrant spiritual life. It is viewed as a daily, habitual, and intentional response, a feeling, an emotion and affection in the heart that reflects trust in God's goodness, sovereignty, and grace, regardless of circumstances.

Thankfulness to God as a virtue is a recognition that He is sovereign and that all that we are and all that we have comes from Him **(1 Cor 4:7; James 1:17).** Closely akin to contentment, it's our way of attesting to the fact that He has and is providing for us and caring for us both physically and spiritually on a consistent basis.

When we fail to be thankful, and outwardly express it, we teeter on living in a grievously sinful state. When mankind in their *pride* failed to give God the glory and thankfulness that He was due, He gave them over to ever increasing immorality and wickedness **(Rom 1:18-32).**

God's judgment came because of their dismissiveness. If failure to give thanks is such a dishonorable and grievous sin, then it is necessary for us to cultivate a spirit of thankfulness that permeates our entire lives; and not just the inner workings of gratitude but the outwardly intentional showing of our thankfulness **(Lk 17:11-19).**

Unfortunately, like the many, we are anxious and eager to receive. We need to be equally anxious and eager to show our thankfulness. We have to be very careful to not pray for God's intervention in our lives, and then celebrate ourselves than God for the results. He will not share His glory **(Is 42:8, 48:11).**

God has created both angels and men to glorify Him and give Him thanks, so when we fail to do this, we fail to fulfill one of His purposes for us **(Rev 4:9; 1 Thess 5:18).** It's apparent that thankfulness is no minor principle in God's sight; it's absolutely necessary to the practice of godliness **(Ps 100).**

While our understanding is that thanksgiving is not optional, it's also not conditional. Our situation is never so dark or desperate that it is not fitting to give God thanks, even if we

have to find a reason. When we learn to be thankful for the seemingly misfortunate things, God can open us up to bigger and better **(Phil 4:6).**

The concept and practice of thanksgiving is one of the foundational or fundamental aspects of Christian faith and living **(Col 2:6-7).** It's a normal and natural result of an indispensable union with Christ, and a direct tool for measuring the extent of that union in our daily lives.

Thanksgiving is essential as it has serval functions. It promotes not only the glory of God but also humility in us. Being thankful unto Him takes away our inherent potential and tendency for usurping or taking the credit that rightfully belongs to Him **(Deut 8:11-20).**

Thanksgiving also stimulates our faith **(Ps 50:14-15).** Remembering God's previous mercies anchors us in hope and encourages dependence on God, strengthening our faith even through difficulties. It shifts our perspective from challenges to His divine faithfulness, which builds trust and fosters a deeper more intimate relationship.

Finally, thanksgiving promotes contentment. In essence, they strengthen each other. Few things will stir up discontent within us like our internal struggle with our Spirit and our flesh. Yet, the intentional decision to focus on thankfulness keeps us content; and vice versa **(Rom 7:24-25).**

Like any other trait of godly character, Thankfulness as a result of the holy spirit's ministry in our hearts. He gives us a thankful spirit, but he does this through our fellowship with Christ. Yet, we must cultivate the habit of always giving thanks for everything **(Eph 5:15-20).**

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 13

After humility, contentment, and thankfulness, we are moving into the more imitable characteristics of godliness; the ones that we acknowledge are traits of God's person. Not only as a communicable gift to us as a fruit of the spirit, but characteristic of His nature is the joy of the Lord.

Interchangeable throughout scripture, the joy of God is also expressed as His delight or what pleases Him; whether it is His creation (Zeph 3:17), those who hope in Him (**Ps 147:11**), Himself (**Jer 9:24**), our prayers (**Prov 15:8**), and even our walk (**Psalm 37:23).**

Those of us who believe in Christ and are attempting to grow in Godliness should have some semblance of this joy, and with maturity, in growing measure (**Jn 15:11).** Two things are true: Only Christians have a reason to be joyful, and Christians should be joyful. True Christian joy is a privilege and a responsibility.

God expects us to have joy, and not by sitting around and waiting for our circumstances to be the determining factor. We are commanded to be joyful always (**1 Thess 5:16; Phil 4:4).** Like the others, joy is not an option available only to those whose temperament is conducive to it; God intends that every one of us exhibits the fruit of joy.

There are several common hindrances to joy in our lives. The most common *is sin or sinful attitudes in our hearts*. Christian joy is essentially the enjoyment of God, the fruit of communion with him. Sin obviously breaks that communion and the enjoyment of his presence (**Ps 51:1-*13*).**

When we aren't experiencing joy, we should examine our hearts; unconfessed, unrepentant, unforgiven sin will erode our joyfulness. Likewise, sinful attitudes such as envy, jealousy, resentment, bitterness, cynicism, unforgiveness, and the like will have control of our hearts and steal our joy.

Another hindrance, or stumbling block, to living with joy is *misplaced confidence* (**Phil 3:1-6).** The perfect opposite of rejoicing in the Lord is to put confidence in the flesh; in our good works, accomplishments, or successes (**Lk 10:17-20).** If the source of our confidence is anything other than Jesus Christ and His grace, it is a false and fickle joy.

A third area that can stifle the joy in our lives is the chastening or disciplining that God has to render to His children. We are all aware that discipline is never a joyful experience, because it's not supposed to be. And yet the secret to maintaining some semblance of joy is to remember that He disciplines those He loves (**Heb 12:3-11**).

The fourth and more prevalent hindrance to our joyful living is *experiencing trials of faith.* Unlike the discomfort of discipline, trials are a purpose to exercise our faith. However, the trial manifests itself, and however severe it may be, it is intended to strengthen our character (**Rom 5:1-5).**

In His infinite wisdom, God allows trials in order to develop perseverance in us and to cause us to fix our hopes on the glory that is yet to be revealed (**Is 53:4-10**). The mantra "no pain, no gain" becomes relevant when we consider the impact that trials can have on our faith and our growth in Christ, toward godliness.

When considering practical steps we can take to cultivate a joyful spirit, we have to remind ourselves that joy is a fruit of the Spirit, the impact of His ministry in our hearts (**5:22-23**). It is only by the Holy Spirit that we experience the joy of salvation and are enabled to rejoice, even in the face of trials (**Rom 14:17**).

One of the obvious practical aids to joy in our lives is to *confess and forsake sin* (**Ps 32**). The confession of sin should progress from freedom from guilt to faith in God's deliverance, to testimony to God's unfailing love, to rejoicing and singing (**Vs. 5-11**). God's forgiveness is always an amazing source of restoration and rejoicing (**1 Jn 1:9; Mt 9:10**).

A second specific aid to joy is *Trust in God* (**Rom 15:13**). We can trust God because he stands behind His word. It's His character that makes the promises in His word valid. Even if, by chance, any of the hindrances we've listed interfere with our embrace of the scriptures, we can still trust the character of God (**Rom 8:28**).

Believe it or not, He is at work in all the circumstances of our lives to bring about the good He has purposed. Our faith or lack thereof does not determine God's working. However, the comfort of joy *is* dependent upon our believing and trusting in Him who is at work even when we can't yet see the outcome of that work.

Another aid to joy is *seeing the big picture view of life* (**2 Cor 4:19**). From a scriptural viewpoint, the focus of our joy should be on the eternal inheritance that awaits us in Jesus Christ and the final coming of His glory (**1 Ptr 1:3-9; Rom 5:2; Heb 10:32-35**). This long-range view is to help us joyfully look beyond our "right now" (**2 Cor 5:1; Heb 12:2**).

One of the outcomes of experiencing this joy is that God is pleased. If Christ came that we might have joy, the Holy Spirit is at work in us to produce joy, then it contradicts God's purpose when we are not joyful. And, in the event that we do have moments like this, we can always rely on joy to strengthen us physically, emotionally, and spiritually (**Neh 8:10**).

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 14

Having established that the outward evidence of godliness is Godlike character built upon the foundation of God-centeredness, devotion to God, we must perpetually study what the Bible says about the character of God Himself. Of these mentions, the Apostle John gives us two truths that sum up who God is: Light and love **(1 Jn 1:5, 4:8).**

The notion associated with God as light is that of holiness. Light symbolizes the flawless perfection of God. Like the purity of light, God is absolutely holy; in Him there is not the slightest hint of any moral flaw. There is nothing in fathomable existence that can *taint* His character in the slightest degree.

To be Godlike in our character, then, is to prioritize the pursuit of holiness. This is not a suggestion, but a command directly from God **(Lev 11:45; 1 Ptr 1:16).** What is holiness? The best practical definition is simply to be "without sin," and this should be the goal for every person who aspires to godliness **(Heb 4:14-16).**

The unfortunate reality is that we will never reach that goal in this life; Nonetheless, it should be our ultimate objective and the object of our sincerest efforts and prayers. Rather than being comfortable with not sinning "too much," the goal is to sin as little and infrequently as possible **(1 Jn 2:1-2).**

Two things are true. One, every sin, no matter how small it may seem to us, is an insult to God's authority, a disregard for His law, and a disbelief or distrust of His love. Secondly, even most godly Christians will have failures in the pursuit of holiness because we still have a sinful nature, live in a wicked world, and face a wicked enemy.

Because of this, the real consideration becomes: What is the ultimate desire of our hearts? What is the object of our most sincere prayers? What is the major thrust of our lives? What are we really prioritizing in our daily walk? If we want to train ourselves to be godly, it must be holiness in every area of our lives.

When Paul was teaching the Christians at Ephesus and encouraging them towards a life of holiness, to stop living as the Gentiles did, he dealt with three general areas of their morality: honesty, peaceableness, and purity. In practice, these would be a great way to fix our feet on the grounds of holiness.

In simple terms, *honesty* is taking a stance that refuses to lie or bend the truth, to steal or deal underhandedly, or be deceitful. To be *peaceable* is to live free from bitterness, assuage anger, and to avoid strife of any kind. *Purity* is to live without immorality, sexual or otherwise, in word, look, thought, or act **(Eph 4:19, 5:15-21).**

Our responsibility to pursue holiness, in the midst of a wicked world, is just as great as was the 1st century Christians. Yes, it gets more difficult as time goes on; the temptations seem

more numerous, the ridicule of the ungodly towards those who seek godliness seems more abusive. But we are still called to be holy as he is holy. It's still God's standard for us.

How do we pursue holiness? The most fundamentally indispensable elements of holiness are conviction, commitment, discipline, dependence, and desire. Building on the foundation of these will can secure for us an ever-increasing lifestyle of holiness.

CONVICTIONS: KNOWLEDGE OF TRUTH: Establishing convictions about the *truth* of the word of God evolves from the process of renewing our minds **(Rom 12:2; Eph 4:22-23).** As the Holy Spirit helps us to understand the scriptures and apply them to our lives, our values begin to change, and God's standard becomes our irrefutable truth and desire **(Ps 119:11).**

A COMMITMENT TO OBEDIENCE: A Conviction is not truly a conviction unless it includes a commitment to live by what we claim to believe. Obedience is serious business to God, and it should be to us as we reflect on what our disobedience cost him. God's precepts, as truth, are to be fully obeyed, as there is no such thing as partial obedience **(Ps 119:4).**

THE DISCIPLINE OF CHOICES: Because of the fact that over time, we become what we do, we must learn to make the right decision in the face of each specific temptation **(Titus 2:11-12).** It's not only saying no to the wrong, but it's also saying yes to the positive things that are in pursuit of holiness.

DEPENDENCE ON THE SPIRIT: We have a personal responsibility for practical actions, but the pursuit of holiness does not solely depend on our willpower or strength of character. The principle of simultaneous personal responsibility and total dependence upon God for fulfillment is one of the most important concepts in the practice of godliness **(Phil 4:11-13).**

A GOD-CENTERED DESIRE: Of all the graces of Christian character, Godward motivation is of the utmost importance. All of our pursuits, holiness included, should have pleasing God as the motivation. Because we are, by nature, self-centered, we must often examine ourselves, renounce our selfish ideologies, and train ourselves toward a God-centered motivation **(James 3:16).**

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 15A

Godliness is the goal, and in that holiness is birthed out of our convictions about God's truth, a commitment to obedience, a discipline of choices, and dependence on the Holy Spirit. We are now forced to delve into one of the least talked about, and maybe even least embraced, attributes of godliness: the responsibility that we carry for self-governance.

In the simplest of suggestions: If we believe that God is who He says He is, and does what He says He does, and we are to Him who He says we are, then we ought to govern ourselves accordingly. This is a tough challenge, but with the aid and assistance of the Holy Spirit, it is never an insurmountable task.

The fruit of the Spirit is the change in our character that comes about because of the Holy Spirit's work in us. The last, and certainly not least, characteristic listed in as a fruit of the Spirit is self-control **(Gal 5:22-23).** It's the loneliest of attributes; seldom talked about, often overlooked and excused, rarely put to work.

The grace of God is that while we do not *become* a Christian on our own, and we cannot grow on our own, He enables us to grow into these expected attributes, i.e., behaviors **(Phil 2:13).** Every good thing we do that is outside of our fallen nature is the fruit of the Spirit's work in our lives.

One of the proofs of God's working in our lives is the ability to control our own thoughts, words, and actions. It's not that we are naturally weak-willed. But our fallen nature is under the influence of sin **(Rom 6:6).** This is why we must surrender ourselves *daily* to God's divine influence.

Self-control is the believer's wall of defense against the sinful desires that wage war against the soul and keep us at odds with God **(Prov 25:8).** Self-control, then, is more in-depth than just control of oneself. It's the ability to avoid excesses, to stay within reasonable bounds, the regulation of our appetites.

This creates a much wider range of watchfulness than merely control of our bodily appetites and desires. We also must exercise self-control of thoughts, emotions, and speech. In a sense, it's developing the discipline to say yes to what we should do, as well as saying no to what we shouldn't do.

Here's the "big why?" Self-control is necessary because we are at war with our own desires. As much as we would like to blame "the enemy" for temptations and eventual sin, he merely plays on, and or manipulates what is often our own internal desire for the things that are ungodly.

What makes these sinful desires so dangerous is that they dwell within our own hearts. External temptations would not be nearly so dangerous if it were not for the fact that they find this ally of desire right within our own conscience **(James 1:14; 1 Ptr 2:11; Eph 4:22).**

Self-control is an essential character trait of the godly person that enables him to obey the words of the Lord. It is impossible to be a follower of Jesus without giving diligent attention in our lives to the grace of self-control. There are several synonyms that we could use to help with our consideration of self-control.

Throughout scripture, and across translations, we find temperance (egkrateia, GR), meaning the mastery of desires **(2 Ptr 1:5-9).** Self-discipline is the intentional training of oneself in righteousness **(1 Cor 9:24-27).** Sobriety/Sober-mindedness, as clear-headedness and moderation **(1 Ptr 4:7).** Self-restraint, as the holding back of impulses **(2 Tim 1:7).**

In essence, all of those translate as self-control ***(Gal 5:23)*** and refer primarily to moderation or temperance in the gratification of our desires and appetites. They have the literal meaning of "inner strength" and refer to that strength of character that enables us to control our passions and desires.

They, secondly, denote soundness of mind or sound judgment and our ability to choose the right over the wrong. With each of them, self-control is considered as being sober or sensible and conveys the idea of allowing sound judgment to control our desires and appetites, our thoughts, emotions, and actions.

They all complement each other. Therefore, both sound judgment and inner strength are necessary for spirit-directed self-control. Sound judgment enables us to determine what we should do and how we should respond; Inner strength provides the will to do it.

It enables the godly person to both distinguish good from evil and to sort out the good and the best. It enables us to determine the boundaries of moderation in our appetites, desires, and habits, and it helps us to regulate our thoughts and keep our emotions under control.

Inner strength is equally essential because all too often we know very well what to do, but we do not do it **(Rom 7:19).** We unfortunately allow feelings or desires to overrule our judgment, at times in some of the most crucial moments of our relationship with God, in our proximity to others, and with our testimony on the line.

Ultimately, our working definition of self-control is… the exercise of inner strength under the direction of sound judgment that enables us to do, think, and say the things that are pleasing to God. As a grace, this is what helps us in our growth toward Godliness for goodness sake.

(To Be Continued)

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 15B

Continuing with our working definition of self-control: It is the exercise of inner strength under the direction of sound judgment that enables us to do, think, and say the things that are pleasing to God. As a grace, this is what helps us in our growth toward Godliness for Goodness Sake.

Self-control is comprised of the complementary relationship between inner strength and sound judgment **(1 Ptr 4:7).** Inner strength is that Holy Spirit-led strength of character that enables us to control our passions and desires. Sound judgment is our ability to choose the right from the wrong as determined by our truthful convictions.

Simply put, Sound judgment enables us to determine what we should do and how we should respond; Inner strength provides the will to do it. Since the grace of self-control affects so many aspects of our lives, it is helpful to focus our study of it in three major areas: body, thoughts, and emotions.

Honoring God With Our Bodies

By the grace of God, we were created to enjoy sensuous pleasures and to find things that pleasantly stimulate our human senses and bodily appetites **(Gen 2:9; 1 Tim 6:17).** Yet, because our desires have been corrupted by sin, if we're not careful, we run the risk of letting the things that He intended for our use and enjoyment have mastery over us.

The moderation that self-control helps us to maintain is what helps keep the permissible things from becoming the masters of our bodies **(1 Cor 6:12).** This is the grace of self-control; it helps us manage our lives in ways that help prevent us from doing things that are ungodly and offensive to God.

Self-control over our bodies helps us avoid the sinfulness of *gluttony* (in both food and drink), *laziness, and sexual immorality or impurity.* Gluttony is self-explanatory. It's the dangers of over-indulgence in food or drink that the sensual part of our appetite leads us to. Even our eating and drinking are to be done to the glory of God **(1 Cor 10:31).**

While most aren't considered lazy as it pertains to the necessary labor that "adulting" requires, many of us are sluggards when it pertains to a disciplined use of our time **(Prov 6:9).** Self-control enables us to create a balance between earthly labors, rest, and spiritual and physical disciplines.

Sexual self-control is standardized by God as absolute abstinence outside of the marital relationship **(Heb 13:4; 1 Thess 4:3-5).** There is also a standard for sexual purity within the confines of marriage, or as unmarried, because even a lustful look quickly becomes an impure and sinful thought **(Mt 5:28; Job 31:1).**

Taking Our Thoughts Captive

Self-control of our thoughts means entertaining in our minds only those things or thoughts that are acceptable to God (Phil 4:8). Not only does it mean rejecting those that are not, it also means being self-controlled Enough to focus our minds on that which is good and pleasing to God.

This is the responsibility to guard and manage our entire conscious person; our understanding, our emotions, our conscience, and our will. These are, in essence, our thought life, and they are where sinful desires plant their roots and entice us into sin **(Prov 4:23; James 1:12-15).**

We are only drawn away by what appeals to our senses (interests). Therefore, guarding our hearts begins with guarding our eyes and our ears. This is why we have to be careful not to allow the things that appeal to sexual lust, greed (materialism), envy, and selfish ambition to enter our minds **(1 Tim 6:9-11).**

Learning to Curb Our Emotions

While we are free to feel what we feel, we are not free to languish in these feelings **(2 Cor 10:4-5).** Contrary to the life of a person who is seeking to practice godliness, or the uncontrolled emotions of anger, rage, resentment, self-pity, and bitterness. These are all displeasing to God and need to be included in our efforts to exercise self-control.

All of these sinful emotions, inner or outwardly expressed, have in common a focus on self. They put our disappointments, our wounded pride, our shattered dreams, our painful offenses on the thrones of our hearts and lead us into sinful responses and sinful behaviors.

Keeping a tight rein on our emotions is just as necessary a component to godliness as keeping the appetites and desires of our bodies under control. The battle for self-control is primarily fought within the realm of our own minds. It is a battle with our own passions, thoughts, and desires.

In order to break the chains of self-indulgence, accept that self-control is the gift that frees us. It frees us to enjoy the benefits of a healthy body. It frees us to rest in the security of good stewardship. It frees us from a guilty conscience. Self-control restricts the indulgence of our foolish desires, and we find the liberty to love and live as we were meant to.

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 17

The grace of God is evidenced in that He does not place any expectation upon us for anything that He has not yet made possible. In other words, whatever He has called us to be and or to do, He has also enabled or empowered us to do through salvation, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and His word.

This is what helps us not to look at His person, character, and attributes and see them as something altogether otherworldly or unattainable. But to look at them and embrace the idea that *Godliness: For Goodness Sake* means we yield to being enabled to mimic what we discover in Him.

He has declared and demonstrated Himself to be the God of peace. So then, we are expected to live in peace, be at peace, and promote peace in the world. Peace with God **(Eph 2:14-18)**, peace within ourselves **(Jn 14:25-27)**, and peace with other people **(Rom 12:17-21)** are all expressions of one peace; the peace that God gives as the fruit of the Spirit.

PEACE WITH GOD

The only basis for our peace with God is our justification by faith in Jesus Christ **(Rom 5:1-2).** This is the point where all peace begins and is the foundation for peace elsewhere. It is from a place of alienation and enmity that peace with God delivers us **(Is 57:19-21; Col 1:19-23).**

Upon entering into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus as savior, we go from God being opposed to us to God now being for us **(Rom 8:31).** Rather than leaving us to the mercy of circumstances and consequences, He now promises to be with us and work in all of them for our good.

Therefore, peace with God is the foundation of peace within us and with others. Unfortunately, this as a foundation doesn't guarantee that the other aspects of peace happen instantaneously. We have to fight for it by the Holy Spirit, as peace is His fruit and not naturally ours **(1 Ptr 3:8-12).**

PERSONAL PEACE

A harsh reality is this: though we have experienced peace with God, without training in godliness, there will always be those, ourselves included, who are *"disturbers of the peace".*
These are those who can keep persons from experiencing the peace of God **(Mt 15:21-28).**

While the larger troubles and difficulties in life typically drive us to God, the petty little disturbances keep us from experiencing Him and His peace **(Song of Songs 2:15).** These are the disturbances that we, to no avail, try to remedy ourselves and end up stressed, worried, and anxious when He wants to give us peace **(Jn 16:33).**

In this two-fold promise *(Jn 16:33)* is the certainty of trouble in the world, and He has overcome the world with all the troubles therein **(Eph 1:22).** Worry, stress, and anxiety then are responses birthed out of being unconvinced that Jesus is able to *care for* and *keep* us as promised **(Mt 10:29-31).**

The result promised to us when we come to God in prayer with Thanksgiving is not deliverance but the peace of God. The challenge to this gift of peace is that we all too often not settle for anything other than deliverance *from* the trouble. All the while God's peace is unfathomable and protective, even *in* the trouble **(Phil 4:6-7).**

PEACE WITH MEN

Because inner conflict and turmoil often result in conflict with others, inner peace is a major catalyst for peaceful relationships and interactions with others. The importance of peace with others is abundantly evident from scriptural references **(Mt 5:9; Rom 12:18; Rom 14:19; Col 3:15; Heb 12:4).** None of these gives cause for exemptions.

And in many instances, we are exhorted to "make every effort" toward, or "pursue" peace, which speaks to the idea of intense effort or vigilance in tracking something down. This is to leave no stone unturned, to lay ourselves out and humble ourselves if need be, in order to achieve the goal of peace with others.

It does not mean running away from discord, capitulating to wrongs or injustices for appearance's sake, peace-at-any-price kind of attitudes, or going along to get along. It means being intentional with one another until we can come to a resolution that allows each party to be at peace. Yet, we can only guarantee our peace.

Still, Jesus taught that we must take the initiative to restore peace, whether we are the culprit or the victim we are always responsible **(Mt 5:21-26; 18:15).** Granted, there may be times, however when you have pursued peace to no avail **(Rom 12:18).** Just be sure that you have done all you can to restore peace, remembering peace with God is pivotal.

Strategically different, but equally necessary, is the need to restore peace with believers and unbelievers alike. This is expected and attainable by, again, considering Paul's instruction to the Romans **(12:17-21).** It's in the pursuit of peace with unbelievers that our testimony is more at stake.

Because peace is a fruit of the Spirit, we are dependent upon the Spirit's work in our lives to produce the desire and means to pursue peace. But we are also responsible for using the means he has given us and taking all practical steps to attain both peace within and peace with others.

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 18

One of the most sought-after attributes or characteristics of God's personality and ours should be *patience*. It's what we are grateful for from Him, but it's also what we should desire to be able to exercise for ourselves. And, unfortunately, patience is much more than just waiting on God.

Interestingly, patience brings joy and peace in the way that it has an effect on our lives. The word patience, as we use it in ordinary speech, actually stands for several different words in the New Testament and describes a godly reaction in several different situations, which blend together to produce an overall God-like quality.

For those of us who desire to grow in patience, we have to give attention to it in a variety of situations and uses: Suffering mistreatment at the hands of others, as a response to being provoked, tolerating shortcomings (ours and others), persevering in times of adversity, *and* the ability to wait upon God.

SUFFERING MISTREATMENT

This is the aspect of patience that involves enduring abuse, i.e., injustices, ridicule, scorn, insults, and undeserved rebukes; and doing so for a prolonged period of time. It is what we know as *long-suffering* (long -tempered or long-fused). It's the gracious gift of the Spirit that graces us to bear the weight of mistreatment and is not without reward **(Gal 6:9).**

The Apostle Paul gives emphasis to longsuffering in the life of the godly person: It characterizes love **(1 Cor 13:4)**, it's a part of a life worthy of God's calling **(Eph 4:1-3)**, it's a item of the new clothing of a Christian **(Col 3:12-15),** and a fruit of the gifting of the Holy Spirit **(5:22-23).**

It's not the easiest, but if we are to grow in this aspect of patience that suffers long under the mistreatment of others, we have to first consider and trust the *justice* of God **(1 Ptr 2:21-25).** This is the complete opposite of retaliation or recompense, which belong solely to Him **(Mt 5:38-39; Rom 12:19).**

Rather than hoping and waiting for an opportunity to facilitate revenge, the godly person prays for God's forgiveness of his tormentors **(Mt 6:12; Lk 23:34; Acts 7:59-60).** This "torment" can refer to the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical stress and trauma caused by others.

To develop patience in the face of mistreatment by others, we must also develop a conviction about the faithfulness of God to work on our behalf **(1 Ptr 4:19).** This is trusting that God will not only administer justice to our tormentor (prayerfully with mercy *Mt 7:1-2*) but also with us **(Gen 50:19-20).**

When we truly understand God's mercy, He can and does take the deliberate harmful acts of others and turn them into acts for good, both for us and them **(Mt 5:43-45; Rom 8:28).** Being patient under mistreatment is done by developing confidence in the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of God that we willingly entrust our circumstances into His hands.

RESPONDING TO PROVOCATION

Provocation, as an act of patience, speaks to those actions of others that tend to arouse our anger or wrath; this causes us to lose our temper in the moment. Unlike the unfair or unjust mistreatment by others, provocation finds us in a position of power to do something about it.

Whatever this action is towards us, it is typically equally deliberate, but in this instance, we are in a position to retaliate or punish swiftly and harshly. When we exercise patience under these types of instances, we are emulating God himself **(Ex 34:6-7).** He shows His continued patience for the contempt of those who are sinful and rebellious **(Rom 2:4).**

The Key to patience under provocation is to seek to develop God's own trait of being "slow to anger" **(James 1:19-20; 1 Cor 13:5).** The challenge is to give ourselves enough reaction time to be able to reflect on the patience of God towards us, knowing that He withholds His hand of mercy more than we'll ever know.

Unfortunately, our swiftness towards wrath is the result of our ignoring God's extreme patience with us. We are eager to punish the person who provokes us, while God is eager to forgive. We are eager to exercise our authority, while God is eager to exercise His love. We are quick to discipline our charge out of anger, while God disciplines us out of love.

Patience under provocation does not ignore it; it simply seeks to respond to it in a godly manner. Patience, as and enablement of the Holy Spirit, helps us to control our tempers when we are provoked and to seek to deal with provocation in a way that tends to heal relationships rather than exacerbate problems. Patience under provocation is restorative.

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 18B

Discovering that patience is much more multifaceted than just waiting on God forces us to consider the many ways that we display our impatience with Him, with others, with ourselves. The ultimate goal for those who desire to practice godliness is to live in a state of perpetual patience as a fruit of the Spirit.

As we understand patience as more than a philosophical "virtue", but an actual gift that we have been graced with by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we will find the capacity to live by it constantly. Because God is perpetually patient (**Ex 34:6-7**), our goal in godliness is to exude it likewise.

TOLERATING SHORTCOMINGS

In addition to long-suffering at the mistreatment of others and the emotional patience when responding to provocation, we are also responsible for being patient with the faults and flaws of others; that are beyond our control. This should actually be one of the simplest layers of patience to exercise.

With life being life and people being people, we will always experience behaviors that will, though not directed at us, affect us, irritate us, or disappoint us. This is where forbearance becomes an act of patience. Forbearance, or tolerance, is the act of being patient with the faults and failures of others.

It can literally mean "to put up with" and has a sense of gracious tolerance rather than a grudgingness of another's faults (**Eph 4:2-3; Col 3:13**). Our impatience in these instances often has its roots in pride and comes from a feeling that we are smarter, more capable, or simply "better" than those we are impatient with (**Rom 12:3**).

This tolerance of others comes from a place of love (**1 Ptr 4:8**) and embraces that, though frustrating, they are still vital to our wholeness as the "Body of Christ". The unity of the body is far more important than the petty irritations or disappointments of others (**Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:20-26**).

God calls us to graciously bear with the weaknesses of others, tolerating them and forgiving them even as He has forgiven us. The challenge is always to consider ourselves as we stand in observation and or judgment of others for what we believe are their shortcomings, correct ourselves, and then work to help them correct themselves (**Mt 7:1-5; Rom 15:1**).

WAITING ON GOD

What is impossible for every believer is the ability to manage God's timetable in our lives. This often requires a patience that is far beyond our human capacity, especially without His divine enablement. Impatience with God is costly and is usually born out of Unbelief in the faithfulness of God and an unwillingness to wait on him.

In many instances, we have experienced, even vicariously, the attempt to speed up God's timetable or substitute another solution. Sarah and Abraham did it with Hagar and Ishmael and ended up in sorrow (**Gen 16:1-5**). On the Contrast, David waited on the Lord and was blessed (**Ps 40:1-2**).

While it always seems to be much easier said than done, the cure for impatience with the fulfillment of God's timetable, whether it is with His involvement or His word being realized, is to believe His promises, reflect on His character, obey His will, and leave the results to Him (**Is 40:31**).

PERSEVERING THROUGH ADVERSITY

Endurance is the ability to stand up under the weight of adversity or difficulties; perseverance, then, is the ability to progress or move forward in spite of it. Both endurance and perseverance are translations of the same Greek word *hypomonē,* meaning a patient continuance, which is a godly response to adversity.

It speaks to *the characteristic of one who is not swerved from their deliberate purpose and their loyalty to faith and piety* (godliness) *by even the greatest trials and sufferings.* This is the age-old idea that because we believe God is ultimately in control, giving up, even under suffering, is not an option. We must "keep on, keeping on".

The source of adverse conditions could be the ill-treatment or involvement of other people, the result of Satan's attacks, or the direct disciplinary hand of God in our lives. In any instance, the key to endurance and patience is to believe that God is ultimately in control, working things out for our good (**Rom 15:4**).

Unfortunately, endurance and perseverance can only be produced under stress, whether physical or spiritual. They are both qualities we would like to possess, but we dread going through the processes that produced them (**Rom 5:3-5**). This is why patience is a necessary fruit of the spirit, because in our humanity, we will always shrink away from it.

Most often, because of our natural eyes, we do not see the purpose of trials. But through the encouragement of the scriptures and the witnesses therein, we should hope, and through hope we should persevere. And we persevere because the object of this hope is our ultimate glorification with Christ in eternity (**Rom 8:18; Heb 12:1-2**).

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 19

One of the most misconceived traits of Godliness is also one of the least desired, and yet it is still one of the most needed in this age of bravado and emotional recklessness. It's misconceived and least desired because it is seen as a weakness rather than a strength and it's most needed because we are losing our human touch.

Gentleness is an active trait that describes how we should react to and treat others. It is closely akin to meekness, a passive trait, which describes how we should respond when others mistreat us. Both of these are born of power and require a divinely inspired humility and patience that is rarely germane to our human nature **(Col 3:12-14; 1 Tim 6:11).**

In the Bible, gentleness is not a sign of weakness, but rather "strength under control". Often translated from the original Greek word *praotēs*, it represents a humble, patient, and compassionate spirit that is deeply rooted in inner strength and self-control. This sense of power under control is of God's character and ours to emulate **(Is 40:10, 25-26, 11).**

God-like gentleness is having the power to impact the lives of others but being gentle enough to be sensitive to their rights, feelings, and frailties **(Ps 18:35 *NIV*).** Gentleness is essentially stooping down to help someone, just as God continually stoops down to help us. He wants us to do the same.

Every person is powerful. We can speak words that influence others; we can act in ways that help or hurt; and we can choose what influences will *inform* our words and actions. Gentleness constrains and channels that power toward speech and actions that edify, lift, and advance.

Jesus deals gently with people, especially those who are hurting, spiritually weak, or possess little faith **(Mt 12:20).** Graciously and gently, He does not condemn us in or for our weakness. Instead, He deals with us gently until we surrender, submit, and rest ourselves enough in Him to let Him help us **(2 Cor 10:1; Mt 11:28-30).**

Christ's whole demeanor was such that people often felt restful in His presence. This "restfulness effect" is the outworking of the grace of gentleness. Which means that people should be able to feel at rest or "rest easy" around the Christian that is truly gentle in spirit.

When considering the gentleness of Christ, we have been given the same responsibility that we find in the shepherd motif of scripture (Luke 15:1-7). The expectation is that we would seek to make others feel "restful" in our presence. There are several contradictions to gentleness that we are often guilty of.

We should never be so strongly opinionated or dogmatic that others are afraid to express their opinions in front of us; gentleness has a listening ear that's looking for an opportunity

to help. So often we can be so hard-nosed with our stance that we make an enemy of the cross rather than an ally.

Secondly, we should also never be careless or reckless with our speech or manners. Saying what we feel and how we feel should be avoided if it is inconsiderate, threatening, or attempting to dominate others. A Christian walking in gentleness is sensitive to the reactions of others to his/her words and is considerate of how they may make others feel.

Thirdly, gentleness is not berating, degrading, belittling, or gossiping about the fellow believer who falls into some vice or struggles with some vice. Gentleness is compassionate and understanding; it seeks to restore and does so with humility, through prayer, and with support **(Gal 6:1).**

Synonymous with gentleness, in some translations, is considerateness, or to be considerate, and speaks to our ability to focus on the other individual and as "What's best for him?" **(Phil 4;5; 1 Tim 3:3; Titus 3:2; James 3:17).** This is a humane way to interact with others and consider them more highly than ourselves **(Phil 2:3)**.

In many instances, as Christians, we are less humane and considerate than non-believers. At times the only way to discern this is to ask ourselves (or others) the tough questions. How do others see us? Do we appear to be rigid, unyielding, and inflexible? Do we come across as good-natured, reasonable, and humane in our relationships with other people?

Are we dogmatic and opinionated, blunt and abrupt? Do we seek to intimidate or dominate others by the force or strength of our personality? Do people feel uneasy in our presence? Do they assume that we are always judging their weaknesses and correcting their faults?

The apostle Paul's admonition in Philippians 4:5 should be the motivation for a considerate disposition: The Lord is near. He intimates that "The Lord is standing at my shoulder, waiting to see how I handle the various interactions and relationships I have with people today". His expectation is that we exercise gentleness **(1 Thess 2:7).**

In order to do so, we must decide that this is a trait that we really want to develop, decide that we want to be mild and sensitive in our dealings with others, decide that we want live outside the confines of rigid rule, decide that we really want to care about people as Christ has cared about us, and certainly prayer for the Spirit to bear this fruit in our lives.

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 20

There are two traits that finish a natural progression in the pursuit of godliness as the defining nature of our character: patience points to a godly response to ill treatment; gentleness is defined by a godly attitude toward people at all times. It is kindness and goodness that involve an active desire to recognize and meet the needs of others.

While kindness certainly includes being "nice," it is also so much more. Kindness is that inner disposition created by the Holy Spirit that leads us to being sensitive to the needs of others physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and that expresses our sincere desire for their happiness.

Goodness, which is so regularly interchanged, is kindness in action; words and deeds. It's the activity that is calculated to advance the happiness that you desire for others. It's one thing to be kind to people; it's another thing to actively do what you can to make sure that they experience that kindness in a tangible way **(Gal 6:10; James 2:15-16).**

Kindness is on display in the simple things; the almost incidental awareness of those around us and the thoughtfulness that we can express. While they are rarely costly in any way, they do require a sincere interest in the happiness and well-being of those around us.

Goodness, however, involves deliberate deeds that can have our time, energy, and even finances attached to them. It did for Jesus. Goodness is described as actions that are not only good in themselves but also beneficial to others. It refers to what is upright, honorable, and noble about our ethical and moral character **(Acts 10:38).**

God's intentional and unfailing kindness is what Godliness commands us to aspire to. And the scriptures go out of their way to portray the kindness of God in stark contrast to our complete undeservedness **(Lk 6:35; Rom 2:4-5; Eph 2:4-7; Titus 3:1-5).** God's kindness is toward all mankind, the ungrateful, the wicked, the rebellious, without distinction **(Mt 25:31-46).**

This takes us beyond the realm of our natural inclination to show kindness to only those for whom we have some natural affinity: family, friends, likable neighbors. Unlike us, God doesn't turn his back on whom he deems to be ungrateful or unworthy. Jesus took it further to teach that we are even to be good to our enemies **(Mt 5:43-48; Lk 6:35-36).**

Believe it or not, each of us has been created to do good **(Eph 2:10).** The word *walk* suggests our common, everyday experiences as a field of opportunity. This is over and above the unusual and heroic opportunities that we gravitate towards for recognition's sake **(1 Tim 5:9-10).**

This really shuns the idea that we need, are waiting on, or would do more if and when God blesses us to be in a "position" to do so. You and I are in position right now. It doesn't

require the perfect setting, the right job, the right person, the right audience or even a prepared plan. It has to be out of the genuineness of a heart for what God loves.

Whether it's on the job, in the home, in the classroom, on vacation, in the midst of travels, life always places us in the proximity of opportunities to display God's goodness. What's interesting is that the only delineation or priority the Apostle Paul makes is that we take care of the family of faith first **(Gal 6:10).**

This intimates that we should take care of our households first, whether it's your personal household or the household of faith. Far be it from us that we take this lesson as a challenge to help others in the world, to the neglect of those for whom we are called and obligated to **(1 Tim 5:8).**

While we are called to prioritize the "household", we cannot ignore or overlook the "all people" of *Galatians 6:10.* But not just physically; each of us has a spiritual gifting that we are purposed to walk in that will aid and assist in the spiritual well-being and betterment of others.

So often we look past the spiritual and eternal needs of others, like genuine attention, a listening ear, the ministry of presence, or simply our time **(Ps 124:1-4).** True goodness is both self-sacrificing and untiring **(Gal 6:9),** especially when we are not trying to "save the world" but are also asking the Lord to lead us by discernment to the good He purposed.

Consider your gifts, your talents, your vocation, your resources, and your circumstances as a special trust from God with which to serve him by serving others **(1 Ptr 4:10).** We're not responsible for doing all the good that needs to be done in the world, but for doing what God has planned for us as individuals.

We all must acknowledge our need of His divine grace to enlarge the territory of our hearts and enable us to look beyond ourselves to the concerns and needs of those around us. Then, as we come to his throne of grace with confidence to receive the grace we need to grow in the fruit of kindness and goodness **(Acts 9:36).**

Godliness: *For Goodness Sake.* Part 21

There is one ultimate virtue, Godly characteristic, that is the glue that holds all of the others together in perfect unity. Love is the overall *grace* from which all the others grow **(Col 3:14).** It is the tie that binds God to us, us to Him, and us to one another, creating a community of purpose and destiny.

As we have discussed in previous lessons, devotion to God is the only motivation acceptable to God for the development and exercise of Christian character. However, devotion to God finds its outward expression in the way we love one another. Our devotion to God is validated by our love for other people **(1 Jn 4:20-21).**

Thus, our love for one another is the more proximate motivation for exercising the Christian graces of ***Godliness; For Goodness Sake.*** Love, over and above anything else, reward included, is what should incline us and direct us to be kind, to forgive, to give of ourselves to one another.

If, as we've discussed previously, "God is light" and "God is love", then it's His natural disposition that precedes the acts of display toward us. Likewise, our goal in the pursuit of Godliness should be to have our hearts transformed, even softened, towards the ability to be love, before we can display love **(Ezek 36:26).**

When we consider love as intrinsic to His nature and consider love as God loves, there are three immutable truths that are expressed at all times. Love is not calculative, meaning love gives whatever the cost. Love makes sacrifices in order to forgive. Love takes action to extend itself.

In the context of Jesus' sacrifice, John's challenge to us seems overwhelming and impossible, but it's the ultimate act of love **(1 Jn 3:16).** Much more practical and more doable, John simply asks that we share with our brother and that out of pity and compassion, even at great cost to us.

The physical and tangible needs that are prevalent in the world today are obvious opportunities to display the love of God, not just from a global mission's perspective, but also right here in front of us **(1 Jn 3:17; 2 Cor 8:2-3).** But material needs are not the only ones our brothers and sisters have.

To meet the other needs- a listening ear, a word of encouragement, or a helping hand- requires us to give of ourselves, our time, our attention, and often our heart. This can be more difficult than giving money, as it calls for us to get out of ourselves, our concerns, and our interests.

Meeting the non-material needs of others costs but love willingly pays the price. It requires us to become involved in not just their needs, but their interests and their concerns. And

we will rarely make room to do this unless we, out of a posture of love, are willing to fore go our own interests **(Phil 2:3-5).**

Secondarily, a god-like love is willing to give in order to forgive **(1 Jn 4:7-11).** This is evidenced by God forgiving at a great cost. Since the penalty for sin was costly, God demonstrates His love by giving His Son in order that He might forgive. Because God so loved us in this manner, we also ought to love one another.

Two things are true. One forgiveness is no easy task. God expects us to forgive freely as a grace. Unfortunately, we often want to exact the last ounce of remorse and repentance from our erring brother/sister before we would even consider forgiving them. This is not how God loved us **(Rom 5:8).**

He gave and forgave freely upon request, without cost from us. Often, for us to be able to forgive, it is going to cost us our sense of justice, cost us our sense of ego and pride, and cost us our sense of leverage. If we are to grow in the grace of love, we must be ready to forgive, even at great cost to ourselves.

Thirdly, love actively extends itself and is more a matter of actions than it is of emotions. This is not to negate the fact that love, even as an action, still involves our emotions at the core, if not expressed outwardly. It is more than a mere act of the will, or a mere duty, regardless of how we may "feel" **(1 Ptr 1:22; Rom 12:10; 1 Ptr 3:8).**

All of these passages from Scripture suggest a familial love and indicate that our emotions are involved. Love should lead us to reach out and embrace those within the family of faith with the deep fervency of spirit, in our hearts if not in actuality. Since God did not give us less, we should not settle for giving or receiving less.

With love at the helm of all of our pursuit of Godliness, be ever mindful that Godliness is a discipline that requires serious commitment and persevering effort to reach the goal **(1 Tim 4:7-8).** It is a goal toward which we should daily and perpetually strive **(Phil 3:12-14).**