



CULTIVATING  
A LOVE  
ONLY GOD  
CAN  
PRODUCE

# *the Fruitful Wife*

Hayley DiMarco

Copyright © 2012 by Hungry Planet, LLC

1300 Crescent Street  
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

Published in association with ChristopherFerebee.com, Attorney and Literary Agent.

Interior design and typesetting: Kevin Lipp

Printed in the United States of America

God's WORD is a copyrighted work of God's Word to the Nations Bible Society. Quotations marked God's WORD are used by permission. Copyright 1995 by God's Word to the Nations Bible Society. All rights reserved.

Scripture references marked NKJV are from *The New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-3070-8

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-3072-2

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-3073-9

## DiMarco, Hayley.

The fruitful wife : cultivating a love only God can produce  
/ Hayley DiMarco.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-4335-3070-8

1. Wives—Religious life. 2. Christian women—Religious life. 3. Fruit of the Spirit. I. Title.

BV4528.15.D56 2012

248.8'435—dc23

2012013408

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP	22	21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4
	3	2	1								



# CONTENTS

Prologue .....	7
Introduction: What Have We Done? .....	9
1 Love .....	19
2 Joy .....	41
3 Peace .....	65
4 Patience .....	85
5 Kindness .....	103
6 Goodness .....	125
7 Faithfulness .....	143
8 Gentleness .....	161
9 Self-Control .....	181
Conclusion: Growing Abundant Fruit .....	197
Notes .....	206

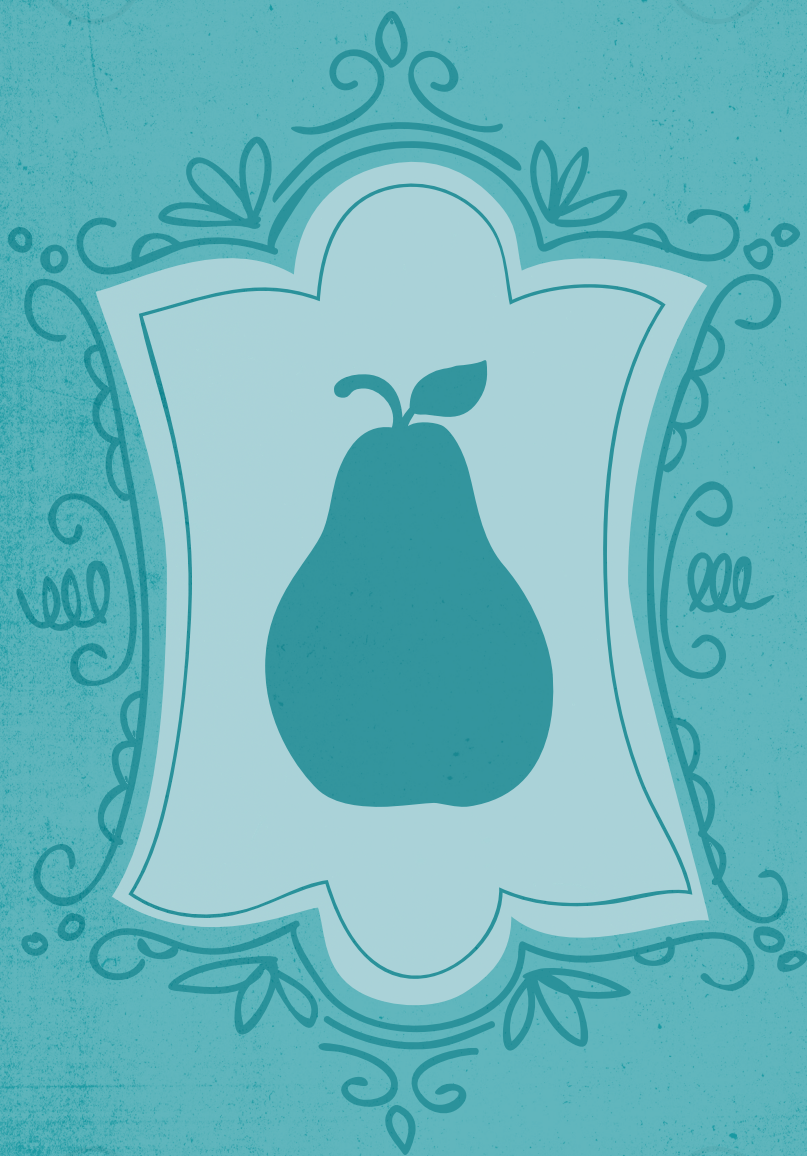


# PROLOGUE

*The Fruitful Wife* isn't a book about making your life more amazing, though it certainly can do that. *The Fruitful Wife* is about experiencing a life filled with the fruit, or produce, of God the Holy Spirit. It's not about the perfect woman, because it's not written by the perfect woman, but it's about a life set on looking away from yourself so that you can better concentrate on the Father. So *The Fruitful Wife* is about what happens in the life of a woman who understands the effect of having the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving, perfect, and holy God of the universe take up residence in her body.

*The Fruitful Wife* is about having something to show for your years on this earth. It's about producing rather than destroying, and it's about giving as well as getting. James MacDonald once said that if God isn't changing you, then he hasn't saved you. And this is my firm belief. A life filled with the life of God is one that is ever changing, ever pruning, ever growing, and ever flourishing.

There have been times in my life when I have been fruitful and times when I've struggled and been barren and unproductive. So this work isn't about my perfect life or my perfect devotion but about our perfect God and his unceasing grace and forgiveness for our less than fruitful attempts to live lives filled with the fruit of the Spirit. I hope that as you take this journey with me you'll be encouraged by the reminders found in these pages of the goodness of God and his power to bring all that goodness to fruition in your own life.



# INTRODUCTION



# INTRODUCTION

## *What Have We Done?*

*You will recognize them by their fruits.*

—MATTHEW 7:20

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*

—GALATIANS 5:22–23

**The fruit of my first year of marriage was a lot of broken plates.** In that year I produced more broken plates and angry screams than probably anything else. If the fruit of the Spirit in you is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, I was a barren tree (that liked to throw plates).

While we were dating, I was a fruitful woman. I was in love, joyful, peaceful. I was patient with God because God had finally brought my Mr. Perfect, though I was a little impatient about tying the knot; the old clock was ticking, after all. But I wasn't struggling with impatience like I did before I met Michael. As for kindness, that was easy. I wanted to please him. He was certainly pleasing me, and so being kind in return was effortless. I was just overflowing fruit in my life. And then it all changed.

See, Michael and I got married later in life than many couples. We were both in our thirties when we eloped to the Bahamas. You might say that by your third decade on earth, you are set in your ways, used to life on your own, and you'd be right. So when we moved in together, our worlds turned



upside down and the fruit fell off both of our trees. We didn't understand anything about each other except that we didn't understand each other. Our fights seemed monumental. And so was our frustration and anger. We would both get so upset at our inability to communicate and at our apparent "mistake of a lifetime," that we would both explode in anger. And in order to save our bedroom door and fine china, we both took action. Michael bought a punching bag, and I went to Goodwill and bought an armful of cheap plates. Our basement/garage was subterranean and covered with a thick rock wall. So we set up our "anger management" stations in the garage with a big pile of ceramic plates for me and a punching bag for him. Every time that we argued, which was almost every day, I would run downstairs and pick up a plate and scream as I sent it careening into the wall. The sensation of destruction and the outpouring of my anger on that fragile object would relieve enough stress for me so that I could return to the fray, get back to the relationship, and try to power through the next few hours. Ah, wedded bliss!

If anyone would have told us how hard it is to live with a human being of the opposite sex, we couldn't have believed them—we wouldn't have believed them. Before marriage, the fruitful life came easily; hope was the focus, dreams the delight, and fantasy the certainty. But after marriage the fruitful life stood in direct opposition to my feelings of bitterness, anger, doubt, and pain. And I came to realize that **the fruit of the Spirit doesn't show itself so much when life is a dream, when there is no chaffing, no trials, no suffering, and no compromise. What shows itself in those moments of perfection is the fruit of the flesh** seen in Romans 8:5: "*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.*" When I set my mind on the things of the flesh, and the things of the flesh are good, well then the fruit of that life is good as well. How easy it is to manifest love in your life

when you've just fallen in love. How easy to be joyful when the future is so bright. How effortless are our kindness and goodness when love is new and warts are unseen. And so out of the satisfaction of my flesh came fruit that looked a lot like the fruit of the Spirit in me but was only the flesh in me in a moment of relationship perfection.

But marriage—marriage was totally different. Never before had the sin in my life been so exposed for another to see—and another's for me to see. Never had my love, patience, and faithfulness been so put to the test by my sinful nature. Never before had I seen my selfishness, fearfulness, and doubt so clearly as in the face and words of the new mirror in my life, my husband. And so for me, the Fruitful Wife becomes my biggest challenge ever. Living life with a man at my side, all the while manifesting the life of Christ in me in the face of my husband's faux pas, misunderstandings, rejections and failures, is impossible in the power of my flesh. I am unable to abandon my self-protection, self-importance, and self-obsession, especially when he's wrong, hurtful, or ignorant. I naturally resort to self when tested; it's my habit, my nature, my flesh. When I'm misunderstood, I get defensive. When I'm uncomfortable, I complain. When I'm tired, I'm cranky. When I'm at the end of my rope, I lack all self-control. So the descriptive, "Fruitful Wife," does not come naturally to me.

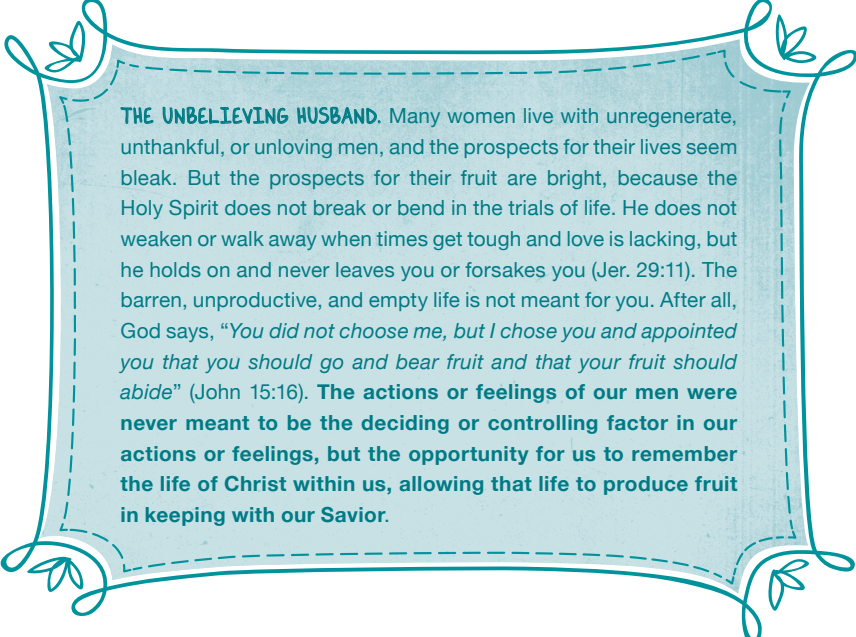
### **The Fruit of the Flesh**

Maybe there are women who, when frustrated by their husband's laziness and failure to help out around the house, are patient and peaceful, but that's not my natural bent. Maybe there are women who, when their husbands reject their advances or accuse them of being selfish or unreliable, still act in love with self-control and kindness, but that's not my first instinct. Essentially whenever Michael points out, exposes, or in any way reminds me of my failure in life, i.e., my sinfulness,

my first reaction is the opposite of fruitful. I want to respond with any combination of another kind of fruit, which I call **the nine fruit of the flesh: selfishness, joylessness, conflict, impatience, mercilessness, immorality, unfaithfulness, pride, and self-indulgence.** These come easily, but the nine fruit of the Spirit go against every fiber in my being. My flesh literally fights against them, making war in my heart and mind. In Romans 7 Paul identifies with this war: *“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members”* (vv. 21–23).

I am not alone. This war is universal; it touches us all. And I believe that nowhere is it seen so forceful and tragic as in the relationship of husband and wife. A frightfully high number of Christian marriages end in divorce. Why? Because of this war that wages within. This battle between the flesh and the Spirit isn’t spoken of as much as the symptoms of the battle are spoken of. Our feelings of betrayal, of hurt, of rejection, of abandonment, of isolation, and of frustration are often talked about, but they are not the cause or the root of the problem—only the symptoms. The root lies in our spiritual barrenness, our lack of the fruit of the Spirit. If we were abundant with this fruit, our arguments wouldn’t have the sting they now carry, our suffering wouldn’t be useless but useful, and rejection would drive us to our knees instead of to our attorneys. The Holy Spirit enters the life of the believer with all the power of God, because that’s what he is: God the Holy Spirit dwelling inside each of us. And with that Spirit comes all that we need for life, faith, hope, and love. And out of the mere presence of his Spirit grows a fruit so sweet, so powerful, and so useful that nothing, neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor

things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, can separate it from us. And nothing can separate us from him, our Lord and Savior.



**THE UNBELIEVING HUSBAND.** Many women live with unregenerate, unthankful, or unloving men, and the prospects for their lives seem bleak. But the prospects for their fruit are bright, because the Holy Spirit does not break or bend in the trials of life. He does not weaken or walk away when times get tough and love is lacking, but he holds on and never leaves you or forsakes you (Jer. 29:11). The barren, unproductive, and empty life is not meant for you. After all, God says, “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide*” (John 15:16). **The actions or feelings of our men were never meant to be the deciding or controlling factor in our actions or feelings, but the opportunity for us to remember the life of Christ within us, allowing that life to produce fruit in keeping with our Savior.**

### *Abiding Fruit*

The fruitful wife is not reliant on her own strength, abilities, or nature for the growth of fruit. And she isn't stuck within the confines of her personality or natural bent, unable to break free to the fruitfulness of more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, goodness, and self-control. If any of those are as lacking in your nature, as I find them in mine, then thank God that he doesn't leave it all up to us, but the fruit of the Spirit is the manifestation of God the Holy Spirit in our lives. And so the prescription for a more fruitful life is the task of simply abiding in Christ. As Jesus explains of himself in John 15:5, “*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*”

So if the fruit of the Spirit is the manifestation of God the Holy Spirit in our lives, why does there even need to be a book on the subject? Why don't we just pray and trust God to give us the fruit? Why do we fail to be fruitful when we want it so badly, love him so much, and ask for it so diligently? Is there something wrong with us? The answer to that question is the reason for this work. The reason that *The Fruitful Wife* came into being is that without abiding in Christ by being mindful, without the knowledge of the nature of God and the fruit of his Spirit, we are less likely to respond to the circumstances of life with spiritual fruitfulness, regardless of how much we say we love him, beg him, or trust him. It is because of her lack of knowledge of who God is and what he's done that the believing woman finds it so hard to abide and trust in Christ and so to develop the fruit of the Spirit in her life. As we abide, we come to know more about him and his Word, and as this mindfulness grows, so does fruitfulness. A modern saying growing in popularity and used among Christian authors and pastors is "preach the gospel to yourself every day." This is a foundational example of being mindful daily of who you are, who God is, and what he has done. Charles Spurgeon agreed with this belief when he said that **"no sinner around you will be saved except by the knowledge of the great truths contained in the Word of God. No man will ever be brought to repentance, to faith, and to life in Christ apart from the constant application of the truth through the Spirit."** The life of Christ found in the Word of God is essential to the fruitful life. Without it we cannot be mindful of God's will in our lives; we aren't aware of his nature or of his purposes for his people. But as we remember to abide in Christ, and so increase our awareness and love for God's Word on the subject of the fruit of the Spirit, we can see more clearly the sin in the choices we once made and, instead, choose to abide rather than to wander or stray from his presence.



The reason Christ came was to give you life, and to give it to you abundantly (John 10:10). That abundance includes a life filled to overflowing with the fruit of the Spirit. Christ will do the work in you; he will give you peace for your worry, love for your fear, and joy for your sadness. All you have to do is “*trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths*” (Prov. 3:5–6). If your life has been anything but fruitful, then fear not, because he will make good on his promise to work “*in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*” (Phil. 2:13).

In his book *Fruit of the Spirit*, G. W. Bethune states it more concisely and eloquently than I ever could when he says, “The mind, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, perceives and understands the truth; the conscience, quickened by the Holy Spirit, feels and acknowledges it; the heart, converted by the Holy Spirit, loves and obeys it.”<sup>1</sup>

The big question, then, is can you truly bear fruit if you aren’t abiding? I know many nonbelievers who love, who are kind, gentle, patient, and joyful. They love their families, they help their friends, and they serve the world, sometimes better than believers, but only because it feels good. Their fruit grows because of the payoff they receive. A woman might love a man because of how he makes her feel, how he looks, or how much money he makes. People might give because of how important it makes them feel or how much it relieves their guilt. People do things for lots of reasons, but whatever does not come from the Spirit, but from the flesh, is done out of pleasure seeking. In other words, when the flesh is our source of fruit, the motivation isn’t God’s glory but our own. So, even those who seem so selfless and good can be, at the root of it all, just serving themselves. And while it can be beneficial and kind, it isn’t evidence of the life of the Spirit or its fruit, because its ultimate goal is glorifying self and not God.

We must understand that without the life of Christ in us, any fruit worth producing is not sustainable. When hard times hit, when tempers fly, when necessity demands it, the fruit produced by sheer brute strength falters, because it isn't the produce of the Spirit but of the flesh attempting to please itself.

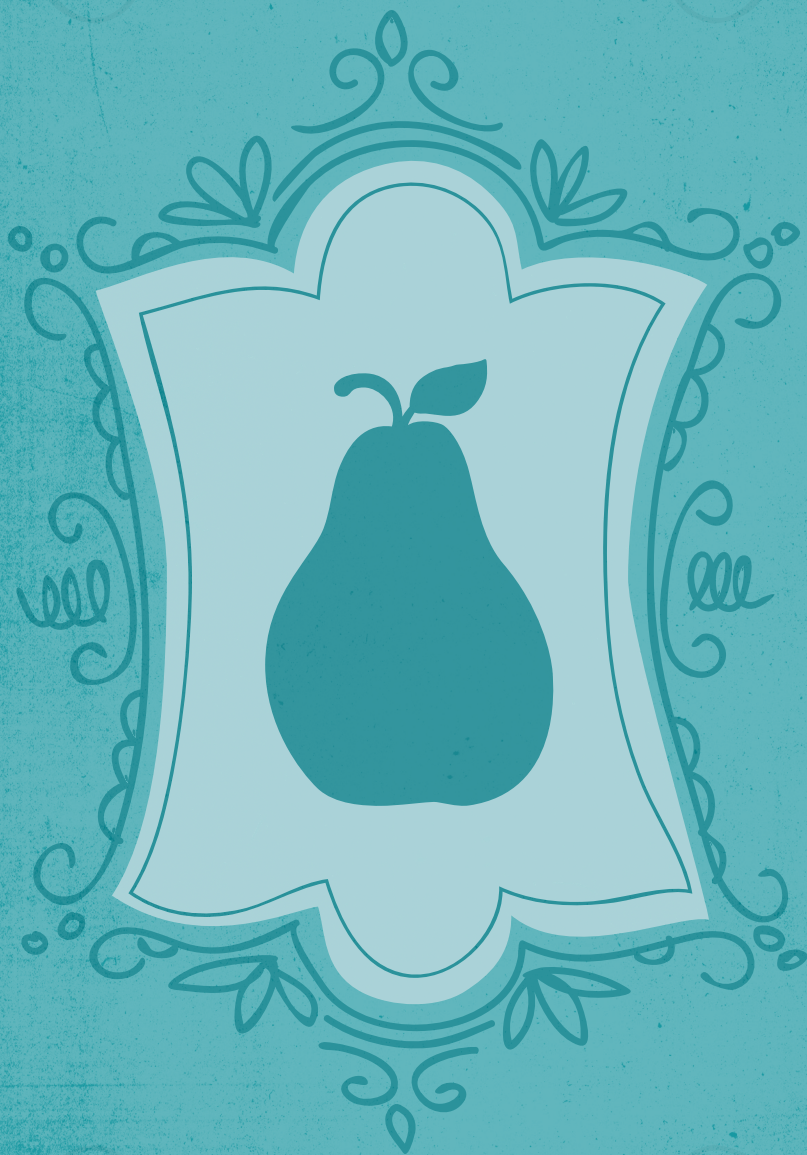
For most of us, any study of the fruit of the Spirit draws us inward and forces us to look at our lives, emotions, or feelings. We examine our lives for love, joy, or self-control and see that we sorely lack what we desperately need. We want more fruit, but we can't seem to find it. What are we missing? Perhaps a better understanding of the purpose of the fruit of the Spirit will shed some light on its absence in your life. Have you considered the idea of the tree? It does not grow fruit for itself but to give it to those who would take it from its branches. Fruit doesn't satisfy the tree from which it grows; it is meant to give glory to the husbandman or gardener and to benefit those who have need of its fruit. So it is with your fruit, which is meant for *"the common good,"* we read in 1 Corinthians 12:7. You cannot consider the purpose of the fruit of the Spirit to be your happiness but the glory of God and the hope, faith, and life of others. **Your fruit is meant to serve the hungry, to prove the goodness of the Spirit from which it comes to those who would partake of it.** Though there is no question of a residual benefit associated with experiencing the fruit of the Spirit—its ultimate goal is to serve the gardener by feeding those who have access to its fruit.

So the fruit of the Spirit isn't about pleasure or pleasing self at all, but about denying self and giving all to the glory to God. It's about needing nothing for ourselves from the fruit we produce. It's truly unconditional, meant to serve the will of God. This fruit comes not from the goodness of our hearts but from the goodness of the Spirit of God, who lives in our hearts. By becoming mindful of abiding in Christ and desiring to respond to the Spirit's promptings rather than to our flesh, we set our

minds on the things of the Spirit rather than the things of the flesh, and when that happens our fruit begins to flourish.

I can tell you from experience that what I lacked in the area of fruitfulness wasn't due to God's lacking but to my misunderstanding of his power and nature and my inability to be mindful of remaining in Christ in my everyday thoughts and actions. What I tend to do is live life as it is dealt to me, reacting out of my emotional center, a place that not only makes the most sense to me but also speaks highly of me and seems to have my best interests at heart. Daily I have given lip service to Christ but based my decisions on myself. But I have found great relief from much of my self by learning to abide through seeking to better understand the fruit of that abiding. It is my prayer that you also, through yearning to abide and so diving into a deeper knowledge of the words of Galatians 5:22–23, will find your life to be more fruitful than you had ever imagined it could be.

With this in mind, *The Fruitful Wife* will attempt to open the eyes of the reader to a deeper understanding of the fruit of the Spirit and how it shows itself in a woman's life, especially in marriage. In each chapter we will dive into the notion of abiding and of better understanding the fruit of the Spirit, found in Galatians 5:22–23, and talk about how when we remain in Christ, focused on him and his Word, the Spirit has his way with us and grows fruit in abundance. It is my hope that, as you start to better understand the biblical meaning of words such as *love*, *peace*, and *joy*, that you will begin to see areas in your life in which you have, maybe even unknowingly, chosen their opposite and begin to see the areas where the Spirit is guiding you to choose differently in the future. Through a more thorough understanding of the words used to describe a fruitful life, you may very well find the Spirit revealing areas in your life where you have unknowingly adopted the fruit of the flesh and be enlightened to the power of abiding in Christ.



But the fruit of the Spirit is  
**LOVE**



*The Spirit is indeed nothing less than the Divine Love itself come down to dwell in us, and that we have only so much of the Spirit as we have of Love.*

—ANDREW MURRAY

*Love must ever give to its own, whatever the cost.*

—A. W. TOZER

When I was growing up, the words “I love you” were rarely spoken in my family. While most kids hear them each night as they are tucked into bed, I was told that to say them too often would cheapen them. This was the general mood of my childhood. While my parents were very kind, generous, and good, they had little understanding of love, and so they passed that ignorance on to me. Affection was rare, not only between my parents and me but also between my parents themselves. I rarely saw any confirmations, expressions, or feelings of love expressed between them, and my parents’ marriage would eventually end in divorce.

## **I Love Big Macs**

Because love wasn’t modeled in my home, I grew up understanding the word as the way to define good experiences or feelings. I learned to say things like “I love horses,” “I love Big Macs,” and “I love watching TV,” but I seldom expressed love for people. It wasn’t until I started to have strong feelings for boys that I got the urge to say “I love you” to another human being. With this emotional and hormonal change, my ideas of love began to grow. I soon came to view love as an intense feel-



ing for another human being emanating from physical desire. My understanding of love stayed in this space for most of my early adult life, helping me to decide that love is fleeting, that it hurts tremendously, and that it is almost impossible to find. I gave my heart for short periods of time, soon to recant in favor of a new object of affection, as I went from man to man.

Love never really found form in my life, not until my true love came along in the person of Jesus. When I started to see what true love is, when I took a look at the Author of love, I started to get a more accurate, wholesome, and beneficial understanding of this seemingly unfathomable concept. According to God's Word, much to my surprise, love is less about how I feel, but more about what I do. It isn't about getting, but giving. It isn't about reward, but sacrifice. And it isn't about excitement, but endurance.

In the chapter of Scripture most recited at weddings, 1 Corinthians 13, we are given a godly description of a love lived not for self but for the loved one. A love that sees the object of its affection delights in that object and wants nothing but the other's welfare, even over self. In God's own words, *"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends"* (1 Cor. 13:4–8). If you look closely at this list of characteristics of love, you will see something striking, which is that it's got the fruit of the Spirit all over it. Patience and kindness are listed first. Goodness is a part of not being *irritable* or *resentful*. Gentleness is wrapped up in *"it is not arrogant or rude."* Joy is a part of *rejoicing with the truth*. Faithfulness is revealed in the words *"bears all things, believes all things."* And peace is seen in *"does not insist on its own way."* The only thing we can't immediately spot here is self-control; how-

ever, each of these responses to being tested by our loved ones requires some form of self-control.

So then, we can see that love is not just another fruit of the Spirit; it is the foundation of all of the fruit, a requirement, an essential first fruit before all others. And conversely, without each of the fruit, love would be nonexistent. Without love, all other fruit will be a cheap imitation of the real thing. As it says at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 13 about this kind of loveless goodness, *“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing”* (vv. 1–3). So then, the other fruit of the Spirit done without love are useless, nothing, a vapor in the wind.

### Love Is Not Just a Feeling

Most of us grow up thinking that love is romance and ecstasy. We hear the words “You complete me,” and we melt into a puddle of emotional goo. We understand that love is more than just feelings, but when those feelings of love are gone, we usually assume that love has gone as well, or perhaps was never there, because we are convinced in our heart of hearts that love is a feeling, and a very good one at that. But God’s Word says nothing of the sort.

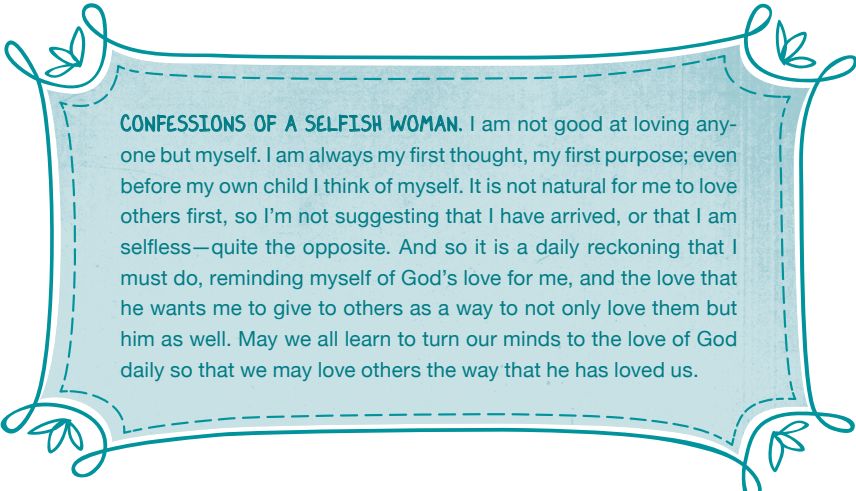
In 1975 the rock band Nazareth produced a hit song, “Love Hurts,” and since then it has been the anthem of broken hearts across the globe. The truth is that love does hurt our selves, because **love, if purely lived, strips us of all our self-interest, self-promotion, and self-protection.** Love is bound to cause pain to our flesh, because it doesn’t serve self but those it loves. That is why love is so hard and why so many

of us fail at it time and again, because of our idea that love is meant to serve the lover instead of the loved one. Add that with the somewhat subconscious idea that love is all feeling, and together we have a hot mess. Love as it was never meant to be made.

But according to God's Word, love is something altogether different. If love were simply a feeling, God could not command it, at least not without equipping us to fulfill it. Feelings are not something that can be easily turned on and off. I cannot command you to feel fear or to feel elation; you can't generate these on command. It would be a cruel God who would command you to do something you are incapable of doing. But, as you know, God is good, not cruel, and so here is the secret to loving the unlovable: we are able to love those the world finds difficult because of God's great and all-encompassing love for us. When we love God with our all, his love pours out of us onto others in ways impossible for our flesh. So we are able to obey Jesus's commands to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us, and to refuse to fight back or seek revenge because our love is an action in response to how he first loved us (Matt. 5:39, 44). So love must first be understood as dependent on his love for us, and our response to love must be action, not reliance on feeling good.

Growing up believing that love is all about emotions had put me into bondage to those emotions. I was taken hostage each time someone assaulted my feelings, broke my heart, or rejected me. I was a slave to how I felt in relationship to other human beings rather than free to love, regardless of return. But when I discovered this one simple truth about love, and that real love is content not to feel good all the time, I was able to give the kind of love that the Father had given to me, a love not found in what man does or doesn't do, but in who God is. After all, *"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:8). We are indwelt

with this kind of love when the Holy Spirit comes to live in us. And this is the kind of love we are able to give through the power of that Holy Spirit, as we read in Romans 5:5: “*God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*” It is through this power only that we are able to love without pretense or deception, without pretending that we are loving when what we are really doing is responding to the good feelings we get from the relationships in our lives, and without lying to ourselves that we can love only when others love us in return. When you love wrongly, Jesus says, “*what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?*” (Matt 5:46–48). So love is not about responding to how others make us feel but about the Holy Spirit’s promptings in our souls.



**CONFESSIONS OF A SELFISH WOMAN.** I am not good at loving anyone but myself. I am always my first thought, my first purpose; even before my own child I think of myself. It is not natural for me to love others first, so I'm not suggesting that I have arrived, or that I am selfless—quite the opposite. And so it is a daily reckoning that I must do, reminding myself of God's love for me, and the love that he wants me to give to others as a way to not only love them but him as well. May we all learn to turn our minds to the love of God daily so that we may love others the way that he has loved us.

If you take a close look at the love description in 1 Corinthians 13, you will notice that it is not a feel-good passage. It doesn't encourage good feelings, but hard ones. It doesn't command emotion, but swift and difficult action in the face of frustration. It is, after all, only frustrating or

difficult people that require patience. And with those who bring out our envy and competitiveness, love demands the opposite. When others want something we don't want, when we are at odds, love doesn't insist on its own way. When people push our buttons, love isn't irritable. When they hurt us, it isn't resentful. Are you seeing the pattern in this love passage? The love defined in God's Word is all about responding in an unnatural but supernatural way to difficult and challenging people. So, the love defined in God's Word is not focused on self, but on denying self.

This is another thing we have to be reminded of as we study the idea of love, that **it requires selflessness**. Not surprising, since part of living by the Spirit means putting ourselves to death, as we read in Romans 8:13: *"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."* It is through putting to death our need to feel love and embracing our Spirit-led desire to give love that we start to experience this first and most important piece of the fruit of the Spirit. The study of love has to move away from feelings, requirements, and self-centered thinking and move toward Spirit and truth.

## The Opposite of Love

If you ask most people what the opposite of love is, they would probably say hate. That makes sense, but it's not necessarily the best answer. Believing that love is lacking only when there is hatred is a dangerous notion that can lead to all kinds of pain and struggle.

I once counseled a woman who was having great difficulties in her marriage. Her husband was cold and distant, and she was at her wits' end as to what to do. So we began to meet to talk about her life from God's perspective. As I asked her questions and heard her complaints, I started to see a pattern. Her husband's biggest complaint was her continual yelling at



her kids, which ruined the peaceful nature of his home. Every morning she screamed at the kids as she rushed to get them ready for school, and every night she screamed at them to clean up and get ready for bed, and her husband was turned off by all of her yelling. I told her the first thing she had to do was to quit yelling, but that didn't help; she continued to yell for yet another week. As we met again, I started to dig deeper, and as she told me that her kids were always disobedient and messy, I started to see the problem. "I know what it is," I told her one day. "What?" she asked eagerly. "You don't love your kids. You love yourself." "That's not true!" she adamantly responded. She was right by the world's definition of love, but I wanted her to see that although she might feel love for them, she wasn't expressing love for them, and therefore it wasn't love at all. Since all her actions were based on what she was feeling and wanting, her actual condition was one of selfishness. I went on to read her 1 Corinthians 13 and allowed her to apply it to her short-tempered, frustrated, record-keeping, selfish relationship with her kids.

"Does that sound like love to you?" I asked her. She was mortified. She had never looked at the actions of love as God defines it in direct relationship to her own life. She had never taken a real and self-assessing look at love from the outside in, and that was why there was so much strife, fighting, and bitterness in her household.

After taking a sober look at God's definition of love, she was able to apply it to her life and to change the culture of her home. Within a week, everything was different. The shouting stopped, the kids started to obey, and incredibly her husband started to soften toward her. This wasn't because of the effort she exerted but because of her new awareness of the life of Christ in her and his selfless love for her.

For weeks, months even, she had tried, through her own effort, to gain control of her emotions, to care for her kids without yelling, and to love her husband the way he wanted to be loved. She had known what she was doing was wrong, but she was powerless to stop. Why? Because she didn't have the Spirit in her? No, I believe she was filled with the Holy Spirit, but she was not mindful of that Spirit within her. But once she became utterly mindful of the life of Christ within her, of his Word and his will, she was able to change what was essentially self-obsession to true love. Instead of reading 1 Corinthians 13 as something to get, she now read it as a command to live out, one that the Spirit had equipped her to do. It has been my experience in talking with women that the quickest way to make a change in their lives is to become aware of the nature of the Spirit and his thoughts on the life of faith.

Understanding love is essential in the pursuit of love. Without this knowledge of who God is and how he loves us, we cannot express or experience true love, and without an understanding of what love *isn't*, we can't truly eradicate the areas in our lives where love is lacking. It is important, then, to realize that **the opposite of love isn't hate, but selfishness**. Thinking that the opposite of love is hate allows us to ignore the lack of love in our lives because it feels nothing like hate. I have found that most of the women I talk to about marriage problems have a list of requirements on love that are seen nowhere in Scripture. They have an unwritten writ, their own law, that they subconsciously believe has to be obeyed in order for love to be found in a relationship.

When this self-created law is broken by our husbands, we feel at liberty to judge and even punish them. When our husbands don't like our meals, when they comment on the messy house, when they don't wine and dine us on our anniversary,

we see that as disobedience to our law of self, and we retaliate. This is the practical working out of a life that involves self in the definition of love. **Whenever our well-being, happiness, or hope is wrapped up in what another person says or does, we are not living the love of 1 Corinthians 13, and we most definitely are not living life from the Spirit but from the flesh.**

The act of biblical love is kind. It is caring, friendly, sympathetic, tender, and unselfish. The acts of the flesh are disinterested, detached, disapproving, cold, and argumentative. These are the exact opposite of biblical love and stand in direct defiance of the life of the Spirit that is inside us. **When the men we love disobey what we believe they should be obeying, be it God's Word or our own, and we react with disapproval, disinterest, or arguments, then we are not acting in love, because each of these unbiblical responses is an antonym to love.** While they are natural, human responses to conflict or pain, they are not biblical responses, and therefore they are not fruitful or obedient.

### **Why Is Love Commanded?**

**Love is the foundational evidence of the fruit of the Spirit, but it is also a biblical command.** There are many reasons why God commands us to love one another, and at least five seem to stand out as the most obvious.

**The first is the most important, which is that God is love.** In 1 John 4:16 we read the most essential words on love in the Bible: *"God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."* What does this short but important statement mean and how do we make sense of it? In answering this, I turn to John Piper, who answers beautifully when he says:

God is love. In a word I think it means something like: God's absolute fullness of life and truth and beauty and goodness and all other perfections is such that he is not only self-sufficient, but also, in his very nature, overflowing. God is so absolute, so perfect, so complete, so full, so inexhaustibly resourceful, so joyful, that he is by nature a Giver, a Worker for others, a Helper, a Protector. What it means to be God is to be full enough always to overflow and never to need—never murmur, never pout. God is love. The implications of this for the way we live are big.<sup>2</sup>

Big is right, and in Ephesians 5:1–2 we see just how big the implications for each of us are when we are called to *“be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*

Since God's very nature is love, it would stand to reason that those he calls “children” would have that same nature, just as our earthly children have our own nature. So, we love not only because our Father is love and we are his children, but, **second, because he has loved us.** In 1 John 4:11–12, the command to love is explained this way: *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.”* We don't love to be loved in return but because this is how God has loved us. When we are given something, God expects us to give the same. We aren't meant to be black holes of his love, ever sucking in and never overflowing; we are meant to be the evidence of his love as we give what we ourselves have been given, undeserved and unmerited. Remembering what we have been forgiven serves to allow us to love others who must also be forgiven and loved regardless of their merit.

This leads to the **third reason why God commands us to love, and that is in order to love him in return.** Loving God isn't just about your relationship with him, your intimacy and spiritual connectedness, but it is also about loving others as you love yourself. We see this in Jesus's response to a question found in Matthew: "*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?*" When asked what is the most important thing to God, Jesus's reply was this: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets*" (Matt. 22:36–41).

So, loving God requires everything that is within us—all our heart, soul, and mind. Everything in us is to be focused on loving God. But Jesus follows that commandment with the second, and that is to love your neighbor as yourself. This is not possible if you don't love God with your all, with absolute surrender. In fact, since Jesus included this second command, it can be said that we cannot fully love God if we do not love his children. John drives the point home with these vital words on loving God: "*If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother*" (1 John 4:20–21). So, loving God means loving others. There is no option. **A woman who says she loves God must act in love to her neighbor in order to demonstrate her love for God.**

If you are like me, you might have just let out an anxious sigh, because that's a tall order. Loving God is the easy part. He is perfect; he never makes a mistake. He is a faithful, good, kind, generous, wise God. What isn't there to love? But man has a few faults. And when we add those faults to our own

faults, we've got a messy relationship and a love challenge. But the realization that love isn't just a feeling but also an action, and that if we love God, we will love others, isn't meant to convict us when we fail to love perfectly but to encourage us to be mindful of the Spirit that lives in us, of his nature, power, and his plans for us.

When Jesus gave a “new commandment” to his disciples after having washed their feet, including those of Judas, the one who would betray him, he said, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:34–35). **We are commanded by God to love one another so that the world will know that we are his.** Can you imagine the witness of a woman who showed no love for her husband, who belittled, controlled, dishonored, and complained about him? What of God would the world see in that? How could she draw others to the One who saves when she acts like the one who destroys? God's children must love each other in order that they can be known to the world.

Finally, God commands love because it is important for us. **By obeying God's commands to love—by following after love with all our heart, soul, and mind—we are perfected.** We see this in the words penned by John through the Holy Spirit: “*By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected*” (1 John 2:3–5). Did you catch that? We don't obey God's commands to love so that we can get love but so that we can be *perfected*! The love of God is perfected in us when we love not just the lovable but the unlovely, the cruel, the difficult, the forgetful. God binds everything together into perfect harmony through love (Col. 3:14).

We love because God, who is love, first loved us. And we show our love to God by our love to man. If our love for God were perfect, so would our love for others be. While I will be the first to say that my love for God is not perfect, perfect love is my goal. It is through being ever mindful of the Spirit of God in me, the Spirit of love, and this abiding, that I turn my gaze away from my flesh, which demands justice, respect, hearing, and honor, and toward my God, who is all-sufficient even when I am often insufficient.

### Loving Your Man

So then, in the strength of the Spirit, how do you love sinful man? What are the practical ways that love shows up in our relationships, and how do we let the Spirit teach us to love? These are the questions we have to ask when it comes to being a fruitful woman, because a fruitful woman will first of all be overflowing with the fruit of love.

#### *Consider Him More Significant*

So let's take a look from God's own words at what love in marriage looks like when we allow the Spirit to feed it. First, as the Fruitful Wife responds to the Spirit she begins to consider her husband more significant than herself. Stop! Don't throw the book down and jump on it, especially if you're reading on an iPad. I know that may be your urge. How can a woman swallow the thought that she ought to consider her husband more significant than herself? That's appalling and weak, but those aren't my words. I'm not the one that came up with them, or I would swiftly recant them, but they are God's words found in the book of Philippians: "*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves*" (2:3). Nine times out of ten, I'm not doing this. Nine times out of ten (and that's being generous), I'm thinking that I'm more significant than my husband. I'm thinking, *Why is he not doing this, or that? It would be*



*kind, loving, or healthier for me.* Nine times out of ten it's all about me, and my world, and how he's affecting it, not him and his, and that's what's appalling. That's where I'm loving out of my flesh and not out of the Spirit, and it's the foundation for all the trouble in my relationship.

At the point that we fail to humble ourselves in any area of life, we have a problem, because we are living out of the center of our flesh. We tend to only do things that feel natural, but as the Spirit becomes the source of our love, considering others more important will begin to feel supernatural. And as that happens situations that used to lead us to argument and strife, sadness and dejection, will be replaced by a love that only the Spirit could implant, a love that fearlessly abandons itself to the glory of God through the love of his children.

### ***Humble Yourself***

It is out of humility that the ability to truly love comes, because humility takes us off the throne of our lives and puts God there. Humility makes life no longer about us but about him, and for that to happen it must be in relationship to his children, especially to the child he has assigned as our mate. We could devote volumes to the topic of humility, but here I'll list just a few ways that the Spirit manifests humility in the relationship of marriage.

### ***Turn the Other Cheek***

The Holy Spirit compels us to **consider others more significant than self, and when that happens our notion of justice shifts.** In Matthew 5:38 Jesus says this: "*You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'*" This Old Testament idea is practical and sensible in a life lived for and through the flesh, but Jesus rejects this idea in favor of a more humble notion when he says, "*But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also*" (Matt. 5:39).

Maybe you have made retaliation a part of your creed in relationship to your husband. When he says or does something that hurts you, you want nothing more than to make him squirm. You want to prove and defend yourself and win the argument, but that is living by the flesh, not by the Spirit. Living for love and not for vindication in the relationship of marriage is a requirement. Sure, there are marriages where this concept isn't acceptable to the wife, and in those marriages one of two things happens. Either the husband obeys Jesus's command to turn the other cheek while waiting for his wife to love biblically, or the husband joins in with the wife in his refusal to obey the law of love, and the marriage is destroyed.

### *Don't Allow His Sin to Be an Excuse for Yours*

When our marriage is in disarray, when we wonder where the love has gone, we need look no further than ourselves and our inability to remain in Christ by trusting God's Word to be good for us and essential for love. When the Fruitful Wife senses her husband becoming more of an enemy than a friend, the Spirit within her reminds her that his sin is no excuse for hers. When her love for Christ is deep, it overwhelms her pain and anger at the sight of a loveless husband. As she abides in Christ and rests in the trust of his sufficiency, her instinct for self-protection subsides and the fruit of love is grown.

God has left us all with a reminder, with encouragement when things get rough in relationship. In 1 Peter 2:23 we read of Christ that "*when he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*" And as we abide in Christ, the Spirit brings things like this to mind, redirecting our wrath and channeling our injustice into trust in the One who judges justly.

### *Don't Take His Sin Personally*

The guidance of God can't be avoided or rejected by the child of God (see Heb. 10:26). That is complete defiance and self-worship and it says, "I know better than God, and I'm going to do it my way." Far better, and the way to turn the other cheek, is to **never take your husband's sin personally**. When you take it personally, it becomes all about you, but the truth is that his sin is all about his relationship with God. It is God's law, not yours, that he has broken, and it is that relationship that must be rebuilt. Once that relationship is reconciled, so will yours be. To take his sin personally is to invite sin into your own life.

Whenever I take Michael's sin personally, I find myself suffering from the sin of resentment, bitterness, and even hate. There are times when my perfect Michael, being human, sins, as surprising as that may be, and in those moments, if I take it personally I feel the full brunt of his sin on my emotions, and I am not strong enough to handle the weight. It tears at my heart and weakens my soul, and I want nothing more than to make it stop by teaching him the error of his ways. But this never ends well.

When our husband sins, the most important thing a Fruitful Wife can do is not react until she is sure that she is out of the equation. In other words, she must make sure her reaction isn't out of self-protection or self-interest, which spells sin. It's important that our motive in every relationship is never self, but the Father. We bear the fruit of the Spirit when we react out of that Spirit.

**When your husband sins, the best answer is always prayer.** There may be times when a wife shares her spiritual insight with her husband, but, like disciplining a child, it must *not* be done when she is angry, resentful, bitter, or hurting. This kind of reaction to sin leads only to more sin. Instead, the Fruitful

Wife calls on the Spirit and allows him to do the work in both her and her husband.

We cannot rush into correcting him, teaching him, or fighting with him, but we must know our husband—his heart, personality, and needs. Love seeks the best for the loved one, so the Fruitful Wife makes a study of her husband, learning his moods and reactions, so that she can be wise in her dealings with his sinful actions. She knows when it's the best time to talk to him about his sin, if at all. She knows how he deals with correction or discussions of his weaknesses. She knows when to pick her moments and how to be most effective in her actions. In other words, she knows what conditions make for a fruitful discussion!

I don't know how many times my temper has flared and my feelings have demanded justice, but miraculously in the Spirit I have refused them and instead walked away to a quiet place to beg the Father for help in my heart. Without fail the Father has come through. Ten times out of ten my prayers have been answered. Our marriage has improved and our sin has been revealed in the light of his presence. To take our husband's sin personally, and to take measures to correct him so that we can see justice, would be to take steps backward in the walk of faith and forward in the way of fruitlessness.

### *Respect and Honor*

Another way God provides for a woman to love her husband is to **respect and honor him** (see Rom. 12:10; Eph. 5:33). To respect your husband is to treat him with kindness, trust, and honor. It is to appreciate him for being a man, someone different from you. It is to admire his manliness and to point that out. To respect him is to refuse to defy him, complain about him, or talk badly about him, especially in front of others. To honor him is to be quick to listen (see James 1:19–20) and to choose love with the descriptors of 1 Corinthians 13 without

fail. It is not to insist on getting your own way. It is keeping no record of wrong. It is not coming in behind him to “fix” something he has done wrong. To honor your husband is a difficult if not impossible task in the flesh. It wars against self at every instance—believe me, I know—but **marriage is a unique institution that allows us the opportunity to die to ourselves, perhaps more than in any other way.** Giving honor and respect to your husband, especially when he doesn’t deserve it, might be the most perfecting thing you will ever do, and it will point to your faith in God, whose covenant you live under.

**Loving your husband isn’t about being in love with him but about serving him.** You aren’t your husband’s servant; you are God’s servant. And you serve God through your service to others. Jesus explained it this way: “*Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:43–45). There is no one closer to you than your husband, so, as you seek to serve God, the first place to start is with your man. The woman that serves prays for her husband religiously—not just occasionally, but daily, continually lifting him up and setting him before the Father. She also displays the fruit of the Spirit in relationship to her man. In relationship to her husband, the Fruitful Wife will see evidence of the fruit of the Spirit growing day by day.

### ***Submit***

When I first got married my biggest fear was this word, *submission*, which I hated. What I didn’t get was that this word describes the fruitful life, the life that doesn’t please the flesh but the Spirit, reacting to others in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. It can be easy to stand on our rights, needs, and wants, especially when we have previously taken care of and looked out

for ourselves. We are problem solvers and quick thinkers, and we know what's best for us and our families, but for some reason God doesn't want us to act on what comes naturally. The desires of the flesh come naturally; the desires of the Spirit, supernaturally.

Love also includes a love of God's Word and obedience to it. In 1 John 5:2–3 we are told that we can know we have love *“when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.”* To love God is to obey. And one of the hardest commands to obey is: *“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord”* (Eph. 5:22). To submit, in its most feared sense, is to yield, back down, cave in, capitulate, surrender, or knuckle under. In its most basic sense, it is to be governed by or subject to another, to agree to what he asks, even when it isn't what we want. This is something our flesh does not want to do.

While submission may appear to be an ugly concept, it is a biblical one, and we must find beauty in it, as we do in all of God's words. In fact, our husband is commanded to lay down his life for his wife as Christ did for the church. What a burden! We are, after all, not really submitting to a man but to God, who has asked us to submit to him. Remember that your submission is to the Perfect One, who would ask you to do nothing that would be bad for you.

\* \* \*

Holy Spirit love doesn't come naturally. The fruit of the flesh might look a good deal like the fruit of the Spirit—it might feel like it and sound like it—but **the fruit of the flesh always destroys and disappoints**. The Fruitful Wife accepts whatever worldly grief love may bring, resisting the temptation to destroy love through conditional and man-made law, and gives even though she may get nothing in return. The kind of love that the Holy Spirit provides to one who depends on him

is the same kind of love that God the Father showed to each of us by giving up his only Son for our salvation. Although none of us deserved it, we have all been provided with it in deeper measure than we could ever know.

If you haven't loved in Spirit and truth but in flesh and doubt, it isn't too late to change. In relationship to your husband the road to recovery may be long, but it can be taken one step at a time, day by day, acknowledging the love that God teaches you through his Spirit. Allow yourself to be redeemed and remade into his likeness. It is never too late to grow the fruit of the Spirit in your life. There is no mistake too big that disqualifies you from love. Every one of us has lived and loved selfishly, but we have no reason to expect things to stay the same.

This "fruit of the Spirit" love is available to all who not only love God but also lean on him for his power and believe that his Word is true. God is love, and he could not love you more. So draw on that everlasting love as you love others, not for how it makes you feel but for his glory and a demonstration of his grace. Trust in the Author of your love to teach and help you to love as only he can love.



# A CHALLENGE

— TO DIE TO THE BONDAGE OF LIVING FOR SELF —



“People bury themselves in things they hope will save them, but the only one who can truly be saved is the one who is buried in Christ. That is the gospel—the saving truth that Christ’s love was so compelling, so complete that he would give his own life for yours that you might have eternal life with him.”

—Hayley and Michael DiMarco in *Die Young*

“...he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”

**2 Corinthians 5:15**

ARE  
YOU...

loving joyful peaceful  
patient kind good  
faithful gentle and self-controlled?

Most of the time? Sometimes? How about when life gets hard or marriage gets tough? Whatever your answer may be, the good news is that you're not alone.

Best-selling author, mother, and wife Hayley DiMarco understands the challenges we all face and answers the question at hand: *How can you be the woman God is calling you to be—a woman who bears the fruit of the Spirit in your marriage and in the daily grind of life?*

To help you grow, Hayley explores the biblical significance of all nine fruits of the Spirit, explaining how each fruit first begins to grow and then how each impacts your day-to-day life and marriage.

She writes like a close friend, openly sharing stories of her own failures to be spiritually fruitful as well as her relational struggles for control, authority, and respect. Ultimately, Hayley teaches us how even the rockiest of marriages can blossom and generate the fruit God intends to produce.



*Hayley DiMarco* is the best-selling author of over 30 books, including *God Girl*, *Mean Girls*, and *Die Young*. She and her husband, Michael, run Hungry Planet, a company focused on producing books that combine hard-hitting biblical truth with cutting-edge design, in Nashville, Tennessee.

CHRISTIAN LIVING / MARRIAGE

**CROSSWAY**

[www.crossway.org](http://www.crossway.org)