

*The*  
FRUITFUL  
LIFE

THE OVERFLOW  
*of* GOD'S LOVE THROUGH YOU

JERRY  
BRIDGES



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BRINGING TRUTH TO LIFE

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# Preface

**H**ealthy human life is fruitful life. We sense this at a deep level. For instance, the desire for abundance can bring forth a home with children, a bountiful flower garden, a farm flourishing with crops, a job with creative opportunities, a business with steady growth, an expanding role in public leadership, or simply the sharing of wisdom with others.

The model for fruitfulness is God. He created the universe in a magnificent display of His extravagance, then turned to His living creatures and said, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28, NASB). There is a generational fruitfulness—both biological and spiritual—intended and prompted by God. But there is also a fruitfulness through the traits of Christian character. Professor John Murray wrote, “Whatever else we may have, if we do not have character we have nothing. It is character that determines destiny.”<sup>1</sup>

Christian character arises from “participation in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) and is the work of the Holy Spirit. This book is about the fruit of the Spirit—the nine character qualities found in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In my 1983 book titled *The Practice of Godliness*, I presented much of the content of this present book. In that previous work, I examined

a number of qualities that I identified as traits of godly character, which include these nine traits in Galatians 5:22-23.

Recently, I have felt the need to revisit discussion of the fruit of the Spirit as a specific focus. Since writing *The Practice of Godliness*, much has changed in the spiritual landscape of the evangelical church. For one thing, “spiritual formation” has become an area of rising interest and practice in seminaries, among church leaders, and in the lives of thousands of lay-people.

This is a praiseworthy movement among evangelicals for which we can be truly grateful to God. As it proceeds, however, it will be important for the movement to head in the right direction. I agree with Evan Howard that “Christian spiritual formation is not simply fostering the *experience* of the Spirit but rather a radical *formation*, a shaping and molding of the believer into conformity with Christ through the Spirit.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, spiritual formation must shape character in keeping with the classic, biblical understanding of godliness.

We should also notice that the fruit of the Spirit is both formational and *relational*—not just a matter for private experience. For example, “joy” is most accurately “joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17), “peace” is the peace Christ gives us (see John 14:27), and “love comes from God” (1 John 4:7). Further, several of these character qualities have a definite outward focus toward other people. They require practice in the midst of the world. As Jonathan Edwards said, “All true Christian grace tends to holy practice.”<sup>3</sup>

Another reason for revisiting the fruit of the Spirit is that I often hear a certain possessiveness today about “my spiritual gifts.” Certainly, we can be thankful that in the last generation there has been a thriving literature on spiritual gifts. But again, sometimes there is a self-focus for the gifts. We use “assessment instruments” to nail down what our gifts are and seek to use

them in a way that can tend toward personal fulfillment. The danger is that the gifts of the Spirit will be separated from the fruit of the Spirit. This can lead to prideful ambition rather than humble, loving service. Sinclair B. Ferguson writes that the fruit of the Spirit “should be distinguished from the gifts of the Spirit, but ought never to be absent in their exercise. For without love, and the humility which accompanies it . . . the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit is thwarted.”<sup>4</sup>

The Puritan writer John Owen vigorously insisted that the fruit of the Spirit is the work of the Spirit and not of human origin.<sup>5</sup> These godly qualities are not something we can manufacture, take pride in, or lay claim to as self-generated. Rather, they are the work of God, and their source is God alone. However, we have a crucial role to play. I call these character traits “garments of grace” because we must actively put them on. As Owen explained, we are responsible for acts of obedience by which this fruit is “preserved, increased, strengthened, and improved.”<sup>6</sup>

With these thoughts in mind, I offer the following study on the fruit of the Spirit, which includes exercises at the end of each chapter. “Love is no ingredient in a merely speculative faith,” Jonathan Edwards noted, “but it is the life and soul of a practical faith.”<sup>7</sup>

Before we look at the fruit of the Spirit, we will first examine how these traits are cultivated through devotion to God in Christ, the true Vine from which this abundant fruit overflows through us.

## Taking On God's Character

*You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

EPHESIANS 4:22-24

**F**ruitful character comes from a great devotion, and the greatest devotion of all is the love of God. A life that grows in loving God becomes like God. John Owen writes, “[Love] begets a likeness between the mind loving and the object beloved. . . . A mind filled with the love of Christ as crucified . . . will be changed into his image and likeness.”<sup>1</sup> The apostle Paul writes,

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18, ESV)

Christian character flows out of devotion to God, and it confirms the reality of that devotion in practical ways. We may express a reverence for God, we may lift our hearts in worship to Him, but we demonstrate the genuineness of our devotion

to God by our earnest desire and sincere effort to be like Him. Paul not only wanted to know Christ, he wanted to be like Him, and he pressed forward with utmost intensity toward that goal.

In the Scripture text that opened this chapter, Paul says we must “put on the new self” and “be made new in the attitude of your minds.” What is this new attitude of mind, and where does it come from? Again, John Owen helps us here. He writes that this is the “image of God” and “the divine nature” that is wrought in us by God and that we partake of by the Spirit of God. It is a “supernatural habit” or a “habit of grace” that is “nothing but the word changed into grace in our hearts.”<sup>2</sup>

What are the character traits that distinguish the person who is increasing in this habit of grace — the person who is becoming godlike? A good place to start is the list of nine gracious qualities, which Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit, in Galatians 5:22-23. In chapters to come, we will concentrate on these qualities. It seems obvious, however, that Paul did not intend to limit the traits of the Spirit’s fruit just to this well-known list. Any other trait commended in Scripture as befitting a believer is also a fruit of the Spirit, since its evidence is a result only of the Spirit’s ministry in our hearts. To the qualities listed in Galatians 5 — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control — we can also add such traits as holiness, humility, compassion, forbearance, contentment, thankfulness, considerateness, sincerity, and perseverance.<sup>3</sup> We devote a whole chapter of this book (chapter 3) to humility because it is so foundational to the other traits.

This is an awesome list of character traits to pursue, and our first reaction, if we are realistic at all, is probably to say, “I can’t work on all of these.” That is indeed true, *if* we were left to our own devices. But these traits are the fruit of the Spirit, the result of *His* work within us. This means not that we bear

no responsibility for the development of Christian character but rather that we fulfill our responsibility under His direction and by His enablement. It is this divine dimension that makes Christian character possible, and it is only this divine dimension that can keep us from becoming frustrated and defeated in our desire to exemplify godly character traits in our lives.

Each of chapters 4 to 11 focus on one of the nine traits Paul calls “the fruit of the Spirit.” There are some basic principles, however, that apply to all aspects of godly character.

## THE RIGHT MOTIVE

The first principle of the “habit of grace” (or what I will often call “godliness,” “godlikeness,” or “Christlikeness” in this book) is, *Devotion to God is the only acceptable motive for actions that are pleasing to God.* This devotion may express itself in one of several different ways. We may have a sincere desire to please God or to glorify Him; we may do or not do a particular action because we love God or because we sense that He is worthy of our obedience. However our motivation expresses itself, if it is God-centered, it arises out of our devotion to God and is acceptable to Him.

Unfortunately, too often our motives are self-centered rather than God-centered. We want to maintain our reputation before others, or we want to feel good about ourselves. Or we may even seek to live a decent and moral life or to do good deeds because such an ethic has been instilled in us from childhood. But that motivation is never related to God and thus is not acceptable to Him.

When Joseph was enticed by Potiphar's wife, he did not refuse her on the basis, “If I did that and my master found out, he would have my head.” No, he said, “How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9). His

motivation for morality was centered in God, and because of that it was acceptable to God.

I recall once being tempted with the opportunity to engage in a questionable business transaction, one of those gray-area situations in which we tend to rationalize our actions. As I pondered the matter, I thought, *I better not; I might incur the discipline of God.* Now, when all proper motives fail, it is certainly better to be checked by the fear of God's discipline than to go ahead with our sin. But that is not the right motive. In this situation, the Holy Spirit came to my aid, and I thought to myself, *I realize that the fear of God's discipline is certainly an unworthy motive, but the real reason I should not do that is because God is worthy of my most honorable conduct.* The Holy Spirit helped me recognize the self-centeredness of my initial motivation and correctly focus my motivation on God.

When God commanded Abraham to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice, He tested his motive. As He stayed Abraham's knife from the fatal plunge, God said, "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son" (Genesis 22:12). It was Abraham's fear of God that motivated him to go forward with that supreme act of obedience. We usually associate Abraham's obedience with his faith. It was by faith that Abraham was *enabled* to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, but it was the fear of God that *motivated* him. And it was this godward motivation that the Lord saw and accepted and commended.

As we look into the New Testament, we see this godward motivation emphasized again and again. Jesus taught that all the Law and the Prophets hang on the two commandments of love for God and love for our neighbor (see Matthew 22:37-40). He was teaching not merely that these two commandments of love sum up all the other more specific commandments but rather that all the other commandments depend upon the motivation of love for their fulfillment. The fear of consequences may keep us from committing the outward acts of murder or adultery, but

only love will keep us from committing murder or adultery in our hearts.

In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul tells us that even our eating and drinking is to be done for the glory of God. As someone has observed, there is nothing more ordinary and routine than our eating and drinking; yet even this is to be done with a godward motivation. Slaves were enjoined to obey their earthly masters out of “reverence for the Lord” (Colossians 3:22). All of us are to submit ourselves to human authority “for the Lord’s sake” (1 Peter 2:13). And our interpersonal relationships — our mutual submission to one another — is to be done “out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). All of our actions, to be acceptable to God, must be done out of a sense of devotion to God.

## THE SOURCE OF POWER

The second principle of godly character is, *The power or enablement for a godly life comes from the risen Christ*. Paul says in relation to his ministry, “Our competence comes from God” (2 Corinthians 3:5), and “I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Colossians 1:29). He says of his ability to be content in any situation, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

It is very likely that God, in His sovereign calling and preparation of Paul for his tremendous task, had endowed him with more noble qualities and strength of character than any person since; yet Paul consistently attributes his spiritual strength and accomplishments to the Lord’s power. I once heard someone say, “When I do something wrong, I have to take the blame, but when I do something right, God gets the credit.” This person was complaining, but he was exactly correct. Certainly, God cannot be blamed for our sins, but only He can provide the spiritual power to enable us to live godly lives.

As the *source* of power for Christlike character is Christ, so the *means* of experiencing that power is through our relationship with Him. This truth is Jesus' essential teaching in His illustration in John 15 of the vine and the branches. It is only by abiding in Him that we can bring forth the fruit of godly character.<sup>4</sup> The most helpful explanation I have found of what it means to abide in Christ comes from the nineteenth-century Swiss theologian Frederic Louis Godet: "'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 Christ."<sup>5</sup>

Paul expresses this relationship as "living in Christ." He says in Colossians 2:6-7, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith." The context of this statement is that all the wisdom and power for living the Christian life are to be found in Christ rather than in man-made philosophies and moralisms (see verses 2-4,8-10). This is what Godet is saying. We have to set aside any dependence upon our own wisdom and strength of character and draw all that we need from Christ through faith in Him. This faith, of course, is expressed concretely by prayer to Him. Psalm 119:33-37 is a good example of such a prayer of dependence.

This relationship is also maintained by beholding the glory of Christ in His Word. As we learned on page 11, in 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul tells us that as we behold the Lord's glory, we are transformed more and more into His image. Beholding the Lord's glory in His Word is more than observing His humanity in the Gospels; it is observing His character, His attributes, and His will in every page of Scripture. And as we observe Him, as we maintain this relationship with Him through His Word, we are transformed more and more into His likeness; we are enabled by the Holy Spirit to progressively manifest the graces of godly character.

So it is this relationship with Christ, expressed by beholding Him in His Word and depending upon Him in prayer, that enables us to draw from Him the power essential for a Christlike life. The Christian is not like an automobile with a self-contained power source; rather, he is like an electric motor that must be constantly connected to an outside current for its power. Our source of power is in the risen Christ, and we stay connected to Him by beholding Him in His Word and depending on Him in prayer.

## RESPONSIBILITY AND DEPENDENCE

The third principle of godly character is, *Though the power for Christlike character comes from Christ, the responsibility for developing and displaying that character is ours.* This principle seems to be one of the most difficult for us to understand and apply. One day we sense our personal responsibility and seek to live a godly life by the strength of our own willpower. The next day, realizing the futility of trusting in ourselves, we turn it all over to Christ and abdicate our responsibility, which is set forth in the Scriptures. We need to learn that the Bible teaches both total responsibility and total dependence in all aspects of the Christian life.

I once read a statement to the effect that there is nothing a Christian can do to develop the fruit of the Spirit in his life; it is all the work of the Holy Spirit. Sensing that at best such a statement failed to present a balance of scriptural truth, I took out my concordance and looked up various passages that referred to one or more of the nine character traits listed as fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. For every one of those traits, I found one or more passages in which we are commanded to exhibit them. We are enjoined to love, to rejoice, to live in peace with each other, and so forth. These commands address our responsibility.

When Paul describes his own pursuit of a godlike life, he uses strong verbs such as “press on” and “straining toward” (Philippians 3:12-14). These words convey the idea of intense effort on his part and communicate forcefully his own sense of personal responsibility. He tells Timothy, “Train yourself to be godly” (1 Timothy 4:7). The Greek word rendered “train” here originally referred to the training of athletes.

The solution to the seemingly incompatible statements that we are both totally responsible and totally dependent is found in Philippians 2:12-13:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Commenting on this passage, Professor Jac J. Müller says, “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.”<sup>6</sup> If we stopped at this point, it would appear that we are left to our own devices, to our own strength of character and our own willpower. But Paul does not stop with our responsibility. He says, “For it is God who works in you.” The spiritual power that enables us to apply ourselves to the cultivation of Christian graces is of God, who works in us to will and to act.

Nineteenth-century Dutch Reformed pastor George W. Bethune puts it this way:

While, therefore, we grow in the Christian life by divine grace, it is *our duty* to grow in grace. Besides, the quality

of grace is such that, though it is strength from God, we must use it. Grace gives no new faculty, but strengthens the faculties which we have. . . . Hence the fruits of the Spirit are the qualities and actions of the renewed man, not produced without him, but wrought through him. . . . Let us then be ever mindful of our entire dependence upon the Spirit of God . . . [but] let us be ever mindful of our duty “to maintain good works.”<sup>7</sup>

## PUT OFF AND PUT ON

The fourth principle of godly character is, *The development of godly character entails both putting off and putting on character traits.* As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Paul says,

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to *put on the new self*, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22-24, emphasis added)

In the succeeding verses (4:25–5:4), Paul makes some very specific applications of this principle. We are to put off falsehood and put on truthfulness. We are to put off stealing and put on generosity. Unwholesome talk must be put off and replaced with speech that is helpful for building others up. Bitterness, rage, anger, and slander are to be replaced with kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. Obscene or suggestive speech is to be replaced with thanksgiving. Even Paul's list of gracious qualities in Galatians 5, called the fruit of the Spirit, is set in contrast to a lengthy catalog of vices of the sinful nature that the godly person must put off.

It was said of the Lord Jesus that He both loved righteousness and hated wickedness (see Hebrews 1:9). And we are to follow His example, for Paul instructs us to “hate what is evil; cling to what is good” (Romans 12:9). Surely we must put to death, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, the misdeeds of the body. But we must also, again with His enablement, clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Just as we need to learn Scripture’s teaching for the dual principle of personal responsibility and total dependence, here also we need to seek the balance of Scripture in putting off and putting on. Some Christians have a tendency to emphasize only putting off traits of the sinful nature. They are usually very morally upright but lacking in those gracious qualities of love, joy, and compassion. When a fellow Christian falls into sin, they seek not to restore the erring one gently but rather to ostracize him or her from their fellowship. A repentant Christian once wrote me that his church knew how to reach out to lost sinners but did not know how to restore one of its own errant members. This is the attitude we tend to develop when we put our entire emphasis in Christian character growth on putting off sinful habits.

But there is equal danger if we focus all our attention on such qualities as love and compassion while neglecting to deal with the vices of the sinful nature. Today there is a good deal of emphasis on affirming and encouraging one another. We are to help one another “feel good about ourselves.” We undoubtedly need such encouragement in the body of Christ, but we must not neglect the equally scriptural emphasis of putting to death the deeds of the sinful nature.

We are to put off the traits of the old self and put on the traits of the new. If we desire to be godly, we must not neglect either of these biblical emphases.

## BALANCED GROWTH

The fifth principle of godly character is, *We are to pursue growth in all of the graces that are considered the fruit of the Spirit.* This would include traits such as compassion, forbearance, and humility that are not included in the nine-trait list of Galatians 5 but are obviously a result of His ministry in our lives. Godly character is balanced. It displays with equal emphasis the entire spectrum of graces that are set forth in the Scriptures as characteristic of the godly person.

We tend to emphasize in our lives those traits that seem most natural to our particular temperaments. But the fruit of the Spirit is not a matter of temperament; it is the result of the individual Christian seeking to grow, under the direction and aid of the Spirit, in every area of Christian character. Though in this book we will examine primarily the nine traits listed in Galatians 5, we should keep in mind a lifelong objective of growing in all the traits of godliness.

If we have an outgoing and buoyant personality, we often respond easily to the admonition to rejoice in the Lord or to be compassionate and tenderhearted. At the same time, we may find it difficult to exercise self-control or be faithful with responsibilities. Our personality type must pray more earnestly and strive more diligently for these latter graces. Above all, we must be convinced of the necessity of those graces that are most difficult to display. We must not excuse ourselves for our lack of faithfulness on the basis of, "That's just the way I am."

Similarly, if we are even-tempered and unemotional, we may easily respond to the need for faithfulness but may have difficulty with the fruit of joy. I personally identify with this type of personality. Faithfulness is very high in my value system; when given a responsibility, I am usually conscientious about fulfilling it. But I have to give special attention to joy. A number of years ago, God brought to my attention that "the kingdom of God is

not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). I realized that joy in the Lord was just as important as any other trait of godly character. (We will look more closely at joy in chapter 5.)

Furthermore, even those traits to which we most naturally respond need to be developed under the ministry of the Spirit. God has a way of putting us in situations that exercise our character in those areas where we feel we are strong, so that the fruit might be of the Spirit, not of ourselves. For example, the naturally faithful person might stop short of dependability if it becomes inconvenient, but the godly person keeps his or her word even when it is costly.

If our personality is such that self-discipline comes easily to us, we may not understand why anyone else has difficulty with self-control. We may be so self-disciplined that this trait of godly character seems to come quite naturally. But as a godly person seeking to display all the fruit of the Spirit, we may weep over our lack of patience and gentleness in our relationships with others.

If we are melancholy in personality, we may be sensitive to the needs of others and often self-sacrificing in our relationships. At the same time, we may have a tendency to be critical and unforgiving, so we need to especially look to the Holy Spirit for our ministry in those areas of need.

I do not intend this section to be an amateur psychological analysis of various temperament types. Rather, I am seeking to demonstrate the varying needs each of us will have in displaying the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. The principle to learn and apply is, *We are responsible for exhibiting all of the traits of godly character in a balanced fashion.* Some traits are more difficult to grow in than others. These will require extra prayer and attention on our part, but that is simply the price we must pay to grow in godlikeness.

## GROWTH IS PROGRESSIVE

The sixth principle of godly character is, *Growth in all areas is progressive and never finished*. Even the apostle Paul recognized this truth in his own life. In the context of his great longing to know Christ and be like Him, he said, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on" (Philippians 3:12). In prison, near the end of his apostolic career, he was still pressing on, exerting every effort to continue growing in his knowledge and likeness of Christ.

Even in those areas in which we have grown, there is always need for further growth. Paul wrote in his first letter to the Thessalonian Christians that they had been taught by God to love one another and, in fact, they did love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. That is quite a commendation! But Paul was not satisfied. He went on to say, "Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more" (4:9-10). Growth in Christian character is never finished until we go to be with Christ and are transformed completely into His likeness.

Growth in godly character not only is progressive and always unfinished, it is absolutely necessary for spiritual survival. If we are not growing in godly character, we are regressing; in the spiritual life we never stand still. The word *train* in Paul's admonition to Timothy, "Train yourself to be godly," occurs only four times in the New Testament: 1 Timothy 4:7, Hebrews 5:14 and 12:11, and 2 Peter 2:14. In three of those instances, the result of such training is positive and God-honoring.

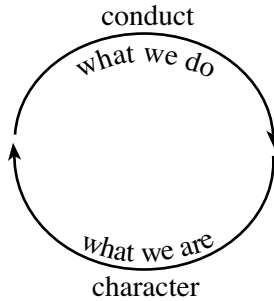
But consider the fourth passage, 2 Peter 2:14. The context is Peter's sharp denunciation of and warning against false teachers. He refers to them as "experts in greed." The word *expert* is the same word translated in the other three passages as "train." In fact, the English Standard Version renders it, "They have hearts trained in greed."

The implication of Peter's use of the word *train* is very sobering. It is possible to train ourselves in the wrong direction! That is what these false teachers had done. They had *practiced* greed so well that they had become experts in it — they had trained their hearts in greed!

So there is a sense in which we are growing in our character every day. The question is, in which direction are we growing? Are we growing toward godly character or ungodly character? Are we growing in love or selfishness, in harshness or patience, in greed or generosity, in honesty or dishonesty, in 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, and the deeds we do.

This sense of progression in character, in either one direction or the other, is also taught in Romans 6:19. Paul refers to the Roman Christians' former bondage to *ever-increasing wickedness*. They were well on their way to becoming experts in wickedness. But now, says Paul, having been freed from the slavery of sin, they are to offer their bodies in slavery to righteousness *leading to holiness*. Righteousness refers here to obedience to God, specific "right actions." Holiness refers to the state or character resulting from those actions; right actions, or obedience, leads to holiness. Of course, both the actions and the character are the result of the working of the Holy Spirit, but He works as we work, and we are able to work because He is at work in us.

The relationship between conduct and character is an intimate one. In the form of repeated actions over time, conduct produces character. That is the teaching of 2 Peter 2:14 and Romans 6:19. But it is also true that character determines actions. What we do, we become. What we are, we do. This truth can be illustrated by a circle formed by two curved arrows feeding into each other.



Conduct is always feeding character, but character is also always feeding conduct. Paul's experience while shipwrecked on the island of Malta furnishes a good example of this relationship. The islanders built the refugees a fire because of the rain and cold. Luke relates in Acts 28 that Paul gathered a pile of brushwood, and, as he put it on the fire, a snake came out of the brushwood and fastened itself on Paul's hand. Under the adverse circumstances of shipwreck, why would Paul have gone about gathering fuel for a fire built and tended by someone else? Why didn't he just stand by the fire and warm himself? He didn't because it was his character to serve (see Acts 20:33-35 and 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9). He had learned well the lesson Jesus taught us when He washed His disciples' feet. Because it was Paul's character to serve, he gathered the brushwood instinctively. He probably did not even think about it. He just did what his servant character dictated at the moment.

Because conduct determines character, and character determines conduct, it is vitally important — extremely necessary — that we practice godliness every day. That is why Peter says, "Make every effort to add to your faith . . . godliness" (2 Peter 1:5-6). There can be no letup in our pursuit of godly character. Every day that we are not practicing godliness we are being conformed to the world of ungodliness around us.

Granted, our practice of godliness is imperfect and falls far short of the biblical standard. Nevertheless, let us press on to know Christ and to be like Him.

## EXERCISES FOR PRACTICE AND DISCUSSION

1. Why is devotion to God the only acceptable motive for actions that please Him?
2. Over the past day, how strong a motivation for your actions has each of the following been?
  - Devotion to God
  - Concern for your reputation
  - The desire to feel good about yourself
  - The habit of living by the ethics you grew up with
  - The desire for security or comfort
  - The desire for status
  - The desire to feel in control or powerful
  - The desire for pleasure
3. Given your personality, which godly character traits are most challenging for you? Which ones are easier?
4. Consider 1 Timothy 4:7-8. What do you think are the essential elements in training oneself to be godly?
5. Pray Psalm 119:33-37. Spend time over it, and ask God to show you areas of your life in which you need to set aside dependence upon your own wisdom and strength of character and draw all that you need from Christ through faith in Him.
6. How can you take responsibility for developing godly character this week? What do you need to do?