Almost every aspect of the fruit of the Spirit deals with our relationships. Scripture has a surprisingly large number of passages dealing with our relationship to "one another". God wants to build us up into a single body, a single Bride for his Son. How we deal with one another is very important.

**3. The central importance of love.** "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:8). “He has loved us with an everlasting love and drawn us with loving-kindness” (Jeremiah 31:3). "His love endures forever" (Psalm 136). God is "abounding in love" (Psalm 103:8). If we would be "imitators of God" (Ephesians 5:1), if we would "participate in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), then we must love. Jesus Christ has given us the greatest example of love in coming to earth and dying for our salvation, and he has told us to love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34-35).

"Do everything in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14). Be "rooted and established in love" (Ephesians 3:17). "Live a life of love" (Ephesians 5:2). "Be united in love" (Colossians 2:2). "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). Love binds all the other aspects of the fruit in perfect unity (Colossians 3:14).

Love is the motivator that releases the power of the Holy Spirit within us. Love for God motivates us to become like God in character. Love for our fellow men motivates us to show them kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and patience. Without love, our gifts and actions are nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). They need the powerful motivation of love to be effective. "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Romans 5:5), and it is that love that releases the power of the Holy Spirit to work within and through us.

**4. Agape love is a decision; it does not depend on feelings.** God loves "the world" (John 3:16), and we are told to be “imitators of God" (Ephesians 5:1). Jesus commands us to love one another (John 13:34), love our neighbor (Mark 12:33), and love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). We have a choice whether to obey or to disobey these commands. We love our fellow man, not because we are attracted to him or drawn to him, but because God commands us to love, and we have decided to obey God's commands. This means that we can learn to love.

**5. The nature of love.** "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3:16). Are we willing to do that?

**a. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.**

An examination of 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 will show much about the nature of love, and its relationship to the other aspects of the fruit of the Spirit.

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**Joy**

Text: Luke 24:33-53

1. What progression in the disciples’ understanding is seen in this passage?

2. Try to picture those first few moments when the two find the eleven and the others (vv. 33-35). Describe what you see and hear.

3. Suddenly something happens to interrupt the story (vv. 36-39). How does the climate in the room change?

4. How did it help the disciples for Jesus to show them his hands and feet, and ask them to touch him (vv. 39-40)?

5. In what ways would the disciples’ faith in Jesus have been increased by seeing him eat (vv. 41-43)?

6. Think about your most impossible dream coming true. How does this help you understand what it meant for the disciples to be too joyful and amazed to believe (v. 41)?

7. When is it hard for you to believe Jesus is real?

8. Why were these activities—showing them his hands and feet and eating before them—necessary before he could open their minds to understand the Scriptures (v. 45)?

9. The disciples, along with almost all other Jews, expected that the Messiah would be a political conqueror who would stamp out Rome’s rule and restore Israel to her former glory. How does Jesus change their vision and understanding at this point in the narrative (vv. 46-47)?

10. What the Father has promised (v. 49) is the Holy Spirit who would be sent to the disciples in the near future. In light of what Jesus has just been saying (vv. 46-48), why is the Spirit’s presence so important?

11. In verses 52-53 the disciples have changed from wondering and disbelieving to having “great joy.” How does Jesus’ resurrection and the promise of the Holy Spirit help you to define joy?

12. How is Christian joy different from the happiness we get from the special events in our lives?

*Spend time now praising God for who He is and what He has done for us.*

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