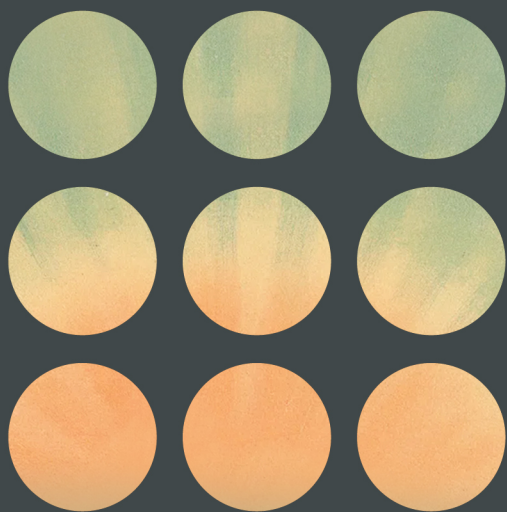


We Will Be Changed



9 INNER GLORIES THE SPIRIT
IS CULTIVATING IN YOU

ALISTAIR BEGG

“With his usual knack for clarity, fidelity, and personal connection, Alistair opens up one of the most familiar (but often misunderstood) sections of Scripture. In so doing, he brings us back to the basics in the best way possible. This is good food for the soul: a hopeful word about the Spirit’s work in our lives.”

KEVIN DEYOUNG, Senior Pastor, Christ Covenant Church,
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“Justification offers the blessed, hope-filled promise that we can come to Christ as we are. Sanctification offers the blessed, hope-filled promise that we don’t have to remain as we were. In *We Will Be Changed*, Alistair Begg employs his trusted voice to show us how the fruit of the Spirit is good news: the kind of good news that conforms us to the image of Christ. Here is both theological and practical help for the Christ-follower desiring to forget what is behind and press on toward cross-shaped maturity.”

JEN WILKIN, Bible Teacher; Author,
None Like Him and *Dust to Dust*

“*We Will Be Changed* is a lovely, hope-filled book that will inspire and encourage you. While at times you’ll be challenged, much more often you’ll be inspired as you see the gracious character of God, the glorious beauty of Christ, and the wonderful possibilities of life in the Spirit. There are plenty of practical next steps, but the book also comes as a call to trust the work God himself is doing in you through his Spirit. Read it; enjoy it; and watch God use it to work in your soul.”

TIM CHESTER, Lecturer in Spiritual Formation
and Historical Theology, Crosslands Training;
Author, *Enjoying Jesus*

“This little book deserves to become a classic. Alistair Begg has given us the best book on the fruit of the Spirit that I have read. It is simultaneously deeply challenging and hugely encouraging, calling us to constantly fix our eyes on Jesus and to look to the Spirit of Jesus to change us. I am so grateful that Alistair wrote this and so glad that I’ve read it. I will be championing it everywhere I can!”

GARY MILLAR, Principal, Queensland Theological College,
Australia; Author, *Need to Know*

“I was so inspired and encouraged by this book, as Alistair called me to look at Jesus and let his Holy Spirit work from the inside out. I found in each chapter that my heart gave a little jump as each part of the fruit of the Spirit was described, and alongside that came a real longing to be more like Christ.”

RICO TICE, Founder, Christianity Explored Ministries

“I loved reading this book. I’d liken it to spiritual fertiliser for the soul, encouraging and empowering the growth of the fruit of the Spirit in your life. In classic Begg style, it’s a moving, hilarious, profound, and wonderfully relatable read, all the while quietly uprooting the weeds that choke the Spirit’s fruit.”

LINDA ALLCOCK, The Globe Church, London;
Author, *Deeper Still*

“With this delightful book, I found myself not only wanting to read the next chapter and the next, but rekindling a deep desire to be more like Jesus. Not only does Alistair explain the fruit of the Spirit, but he shows us how it operates and how it liberates. It felt more like a tutorial on how to walk with God in my daily life. My bet is that you will find this book to be downright life-changing!”

SKIP HEITZIG, Senior Pastor, Calvary Church,
Albuquerque, New Mexico

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*To my dear friends
Jim and Romy Burrows*

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

Contents

Introduction: Your Life Is a Sermon	9
1. The Fountain	19
2. A Gloriously Inappropriate Joy	29
3. We Have All We Need	41
4. Formed on Stormy Seas	53
5. What Kindness Looks Like	63
6. Faithfulness > Success	73
7. Strength Under Control	83
8. How to Win Each Day (in the Battle That Actually Matters)	93
A Different Kind of Conclusion	105

INTRODUCTION

Your Life Is a Sermon

God saves us just as we are, but he is not content for us to remain just as we are.

No—God’s great purpose for us, having saved us, is to conform us into the image of Christ (Romans 8:28-29). In fact, that is the good for which he is always working in all aspects of our lives. There are not two versions of Christianity—the “basic” option, in which our souls are saved but our characters remain unchanged, and the “deluxe” option for those who are super-committed, which involves the hard work of becoming more like Jesus. Christianity is about both justification—the work of God in our lives to bring us to faith in Christ, that he might take our judgment and give us his perfection—and sanctification—the ongoing process in which God is at work to make us more and more like our Savior. The Bible calls us to become what we are so that what God has done will be transparently clear.

In other words, God cares about what you are like. He cares about your character.

The New Testament, therefore, is full of exhortations to turn away from who we were and fully embrace who we now are. “If then you have been raised with Christ”—since we have a new identity—there is an “old self” that we are to put off and a “new self, which is being renewed ... after the image of its creator,” that we are to put on (Colossians 3:1, 9-10). The Christian life involves change.

Wherever you open it up, you do not have to read many pages of the New Testament to find this kind of encouragement to become who you are. God is concerned with our character, for, as Jesus put it, “by this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit” (John 15:8).

Not only that, but your character is preaching a message, one way or another, as you go about your life each day.

In his letter to Titus, Paul tells him to “teach what accords with sound doctrine” (2:1) “so that in everything [believers] may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” (v 10).¹ There is a way to live that will both display the truth about God and make the truth about God attractive. As J.B. Phillips paraphrases that verse, we are called to be “a living testimonial to the teaching of God our saviour.”

And so the question we need to wrestle with is not simply “Does my ability to articulate the gospel make people want to believe it?” or “Does my ability to answer questions—to act as an apologist—make people want to believe?” but “Does my *character* make the gospel attractive so as to make people wish they believed it?”

¹ The apostle is speaking here in particular about what Titus is to teach to Christian bondservants—but the principle remains true more widely.

Ours is a divided and disappointed age. But there is a way to live that makes people see that you have what they don't—that makes them see that Christian faith makes a genuine difference to what a person is like and how they navigate life with peace and joy. The reverse, of course, is also true: it is possible to live in such a way that onlookers gain the distinct impression that a profession of belief makes no discernible difference.

So, what do people see in you? As the little poem I was taught as a boy puts it:

You're writing a gospel,
A chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do
And the words that you say;
And people read what you write,
Distorted or true,
So what is the gospel
According to you?

When Christians look like Christ, we glorify God and impact the world. It matters. What the church needs today is not primarily better programs or apologetic resources or buildings, or more financial resources or greater political sway. What the church needs is Christians of increasingly Christlike character, so that what is found inside the church is radically different than the world outside the church. God cares about our character far more than he does our gifts or achievements or qualifications. If it were a crime for our churches to be places of radical love and distinctive kindness, for instance, would they be found guilty? If it were a crime for me to be full of joy and patience, would *I* be convicted?

In other words, am I, every day, in every way, making the gospel of the Lord Jesus attractive—not in what I say so much as in what I am like? How am I reflecting the glory of my Savior to the world he loved so much that he was born into it in order to die for it?

If you are like me, the answers to those questions as you consider your own life will be partly encouraging and primarily challenging. For none of us, if we are honest, are all that we would like to be. Most of us, in our quieter moments, wish we were better at the Christian life. Many of us, if we have been following Jesus for any stretch of time, are frustrated that we have not changed as much as we thought we would.

The danger of pointing out that God cares about your character and is not content for you to remain as you are is that it leads you to resolve to be better, to do better, to work harder. But that is not how real change comes, for that is not how Christlikeness is achieved.

We will be changed—but Christian change is produced in us, not by us. It is the work of the Spirit. God cares about your character enough to be at work on your character.

So this little book is about what you are like and what you will become like—or, to put it in the imagery the apostle Paul famously deploys in Galatians 5, it is about “the fruit of the Spirit” in the life of the believer: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (v 22-23). These are nine inner glories whose presence (or lack) will reveal itself in what we say and what we do. This is a picture of an internal godliness that makes a practical difference.

But before we start, we need to pause and ask two questions: first, what does God's word mean by "the fruit of the Spirit"; and second, how does that fruit grow in your life?

WHAT IS THE FRUIT?

First, notice that Paul says "fruit," not "fruits." These nine aspects of Christian character together form one indivisible fruit of the Spirit. They are to grow together, not separately; and we are to pursue them collectively, not selectively. Some of us are temperamentally more one of these things and less one of the others. There's therefore a temptation to think that growth in one can make up for a lack in another. But, as John Stott put it, God is not in the business of making lopsided Christians.² The work of the Spirit is to grow you in each of these, together.

Second, notice the simple fact that Paul uses fruit as his image. Of course, he is following the Lord Jesus in this, who spoke of himself as the vine and his people as the branches, who are to bear fruit (John 15). But fruit itself is an apt image for the way Christian character is formed in Christian believers, because fruit grows slowly and fruit grows continuously. I am at the edge of my very limited horticultural knowledge here, but I remember that my grandmother would always plant her hyacinth bulbs in the autumn, and they would bloom in the spring, and in between, most of the time, there was little happening, as far as I could see. One day to the next, there was little evidence of growth. Sometimes, all the growth was happening away

2 John R.W. Stott, "The Holy Spirit and Christian Holiness," in *The Keswick Week: 1965* (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1965), p.144.

from the naked eye. And yet growth was happening, and beauty was developing. This is how the qualities the Spirit grows develop in us too. We are saved in an instant, when we put our faith in Jesus; we are changed over time, as his Spirit goes to work. Fruit does not grow overnight, but it does grow. We *will* be changed.

Third, fruit comes from faith. Paul is speaking to “those who belong to Christ Jesus” (Galatians 5:24). Christian character is a consequence of having come to faith in Jesus: for those for whom Jesus has given “himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age” (1:4); those who have received “adoption as sons” (4:5); and those who have been set free in the Lord Jesus Christ (5:1). Fruit follows faith; fruit does not form faith. It is an inward change of heart that reveals itself in external changes in what we say and do.

It is vital to grasp this. The contents of this book are not like Christmas tree ornaments that you can pick up and attach externally to your life. When you put ornaments on a Christmas tree, they may look attractive for a while, but they’re not real; there is no life in them. They are not fruit. After a while, they are taken off again. No—this is real fruit, not plastic fruit, and real fruit grows organically, reflecting the nature of the tree on which it grows. The life that produces true fruit is the life of Christ that is implanted in the believer. Fruit is the evidence of true faith; but it is not the grounds of it. As Tim Keller put it, we are not saved by fruit but by faith—but not fruitless faith. So as you read, where you see that your own life reflects the character God calls for, be encouraged; it is a sign of the genuineness of your faith in Christ—of the transforming work of the Spirit. And

where you see that your own life falls short of that character in some way, don't simply try harder to attach that behavior to your life, like an ornament on a Christmas tree; instead, ask God to go to work in you by his Spirit, so that your heart is changed and real fruit therefore grows.

HOW DOES FRUIT GROW?

Crucially—and this is a truth to which we shall return again and again throughout—the fruit of the Spirit is the fruit *of the Spirit*. It is not manufactured by us; it is cultivated in us. The danger of a book such as this is that its main result is to leave you resolving to put more effort into progressing in the Christian life. But the humbling truth is that you cannot grow this fruit yourself. It is the fruit of the Spirit, and you will need to depend on him and look to him to form this character in you. Yet, at the same time, you are not called to just sit quietly and wait for it to happen. That is, our sanctification—the growth of Christian character in us—is both active and passive, and we must not forget either. Forget the latter and we approach the Christian life as though we can progress in it by our own perspiration—and sooner or later we give up, exhausted. Forget the former and we approach the Christian life as though we can sit down on a couch and wait for the Spirit to do it all for us—and sooner or later we wonder why we have not changed.

Paul describes the biblical dynamic in Philippians 2:

Work out your own salvation with fear and
trembling, for it is God who works in you.

(v 12-13)

God works as we work. As we seek to apply our salvation to each area of our lives, we find that God is at work powerfully to achieve what we could not do in our own strength. To put it another way, you must rely on the Spirit to grow his fruit in you, but you need to work to let the Spirit do his work in you. I cannot provide the power to the toaster in my kitchen but must use the electrical power source that comes into my home. Equally, I cannot change myself but must depend on the Spirit's power. At the same time, though, my toaster does nothing with the electrical power until I turn the toaster on. I have to choose to use the power that is available to me. Likewise, I am called to make the effort to keep in step with the Spirit rather than ignoring or resisting him, either through self-reliance or through complacency.

How, then, does the Spirit work in us to grow this fruit? How are we changed?

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)

It is as we look at Jesus that we are changed to become more like Jesus. The example of Christ informs us; the love of Christ inspires us; the Spirit of Christ empowers us. The Lord who is the Spirit shows us Christ in his word, and as we see him, we grow in our devotion to him, and so we are conformed increasingly to his character, slowly and continuously, from one degree of glory to another. The Spirit changes us from inside out, not outside in. As

Jerry Bridges put it, a “focus on the outward structure of character and conduct without taking the time to build the inward foundation of devotion to God” will eventually result in “cold morality or legalism, or even worse, self-righteousness and spiritual pride.”³

The great secret of growth in true Christian character is to look far less at ourselves and far more at Christ as we depend less on ourselves and more on his Spirit. My prayer is that this book will encourage you to pursue the nine inner glories of the fruit of the Spirit and to depend with humility and confidence on the Spirit to effect that change in you. For it is as we keep in step with him that we will be changed—for God’s glory, for our good, and for the sake of the world, which desperately needs to see the difference Christ makes as it looks at the conduct of his people.

3 Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (NavPress, 1996), p.55.

CHAPTER ONE

The Fountain

The outpouring of the love of God is the story of the Bible; and the overflow of the love of God in and from his people is meant to be the story of the church.

Love is the first of the qualities of the fruit of the Spirit that Paul mentions, and I think that this is deliberate on his part. Love is the fountain out of which the rest of the characteristics listed in Galatians 5:22-23 flow. True love is seen in joyfulness and patience and self-control and so on; and true joyfulness and patience and self-control and so on will only flow from love.

I suspect that none of us know how loved we are (though we have an eternity to look forward to in which to perhaps start to begin to grasp it). “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us” (1 John 4:10). God loves us because he is love (v 8). God is love. He is more than that, but he is never less than that. It is the unique nature of God—Father, Son, and Spirit.

And God’s love, which constantly flows within himself, Father, Son, and Spirit, is something we who have put our faith in the Son can experience because “God’s love

has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:5). We are loved objectively by God—it is an immovable fact that God loves his children. But we can experience subjectively the love of God—it can fill our hearts with gladness. This is because the Spirit works in us to say to us, *Look, you are loved. God loves you as a perfect Father, and that will never change. On your worst days, you are loved beyond measure. On your best days, you are loved beyond measure.*

When I was a child in Scotland, we used to sing:

God’s love is like the sunshine;
It covers land and sea.
It fills my heart with gladness
When I know that God loves me.

This is a wonderful truth, highlighting the very personal nature of God’s interest in me and concern for me—and you. God’s love has not been injected through a narrow vein. God’s love has not dripped upon us in careful measure. God’s love has been lavished upon us. It has been poured out upon us. Right now, God is withholding none of his love and care from you. Everything that God is doing in you and for you and around you is because he loves you. After all, “he who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32).

NO REGARD FOR OUR MERITS

What makes God’s love for us all the more wonderful is when we consider it in contrast to the truth that, if we are honest, our own expressions of love are proportional to the

attractiveness or worthiness of the object of our affection. So we feel love for and express love to someone who is in some way lovely. But that is not the love of God. God's love has no regard for our merits. As Moses told God's Old Testament people as they prepared to enter the land God had promised to bless them with, "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you" (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). Divine love is not predicated or conditional upon its recipient being worthy of it. We could say that it is grounded in the character of the Person who loves rather than in the performance of the person receiving it.

That is deeply humbling, for there is something in us that would like to think of ourselves as fairly good or quite attractive and therefore, to some extent, worthy of God's love. We do not, by nature, adopt the view of ourselves that we were "dead in [our] trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). As the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, originally written by the 16th-century Reformer Thomas Cranmer, puts it:

We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not have done; And there is no health in us.

But when we consider the height and depth of God's love and, at the same time, acknowledge that we in no way deserve to be the recipients of it, it becomes deeply reassuring. For, if there was nothing we did to earn his love,

there is nothing we can do to lose it. In love, God chose you. In love, God redeemed you. In love, God brought you to faith in Christ. In love, God poured out his Spirit into you so that you would know his love. In love, God will keep you in Christ until you stand before him. Then you will enjoy his love forever.

The nature of God's love is also uniquely unifying. The greatest division throughout human history is the one between God and man, because man is determined to live in enmity toward God, alienated from him (Colossians 1:21), and because God is a just judge who will call everyone to account. What is it that bridged that chasm and made enemies into children? "God so *loved* the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16, emphasis mine). "Because of his great *love* for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions" (Ephesians 2:4-5, NIV). What bridged the chasm was divine love, the love that sent Jesus to the cross and that sent the Spirit into our hearts.

But God's love unites us not only to him but also to each other. The second greatest division in human history was the one between Jews and Gentiles—those who were part of God's Old Testament people and those who were not. What is it that bridged that chasm and made enemies into brothers and sisters? "In Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ ... [He] has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (v 13-14, NIV). It was divine love, the love that sent Jesus to the cross and sent the

Spirit into our hearts. This kind of love brings close those who were far away and unites those who were divided.

TO US AND THROUGH US

Why do we linger so long on what God is like and how he loves? Because his love to us is then to flow through us. Fundamentally, the Christian life is very simple: it is all about love. We are loved by God, and then we respond to his love by obeying the two greatest commands, as Jesus summarized the entire law of God: to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength—everything we have and are—and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:29-31). Love is expressed in both a Godward and a humanward direction. Therefore, our love for those around us is the validation of our declaration of love for God.

This is very hard if you are anything like me. When I am on my own in the car, I can convince myself that I have a great love for God and that I want to love others with the same kind of love that God does. Then someone cuts me off, and suddenly loving others is a lot harder. I am good at loving others in theory, but in practice not so strong. But the validation of genuine love for God is seen in everyday working clothes as I interact with others, not when I am in my Sunday best and singing hymns. “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen,” says John, “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 4:20b-21).

Displaying this kind of love is not easy. (It was not easy for Jesus either; it took him to the cross.) But it is a wonderful thing because it is a reassuring and a unifying thing. Ours is

a transactional and divided age. So many of our relationships are based on what others can do for us or what we can do for others. So often, the way others treat us (and the way we treat others) is performance based. And so much of our media discourse, which overflows into our own conversations over the backyard fence or even around our family tables, is marked by division. Think about how status and education and achievements and wealth and background and political allegiance are dividing lines in our wider society and local communities, and even in our friendship groups. It is so pervasive that we often do not notice it.

But the love of God that flows to us and is to flow through us is a unifying force. There is a place where all those divisions are to be dismantled and neutralized—where everything that sets us apart from each other is to be set aside. That place is the people of God. The love of God has been given to us without any regard for our merit, and so we can love others without any regard for their merit. We can look at each other and say to ourselves (or, better, sing to ourselves!):

I love you with the love of the Lord;
Yes, I love you with the love of the Lord,
I can see in you the glory of my King,
And I love you with the love of the Lord.⁴

There is great wisdom and great power in that.

WHAT LOVE LOOKS LIKE

What does this kind of love—the Christlike love that the Spirit grows in Christ's people—look like?

⁴ Jim Gilbert, "I Love You with the Love of the Lord" (1977).

First, it takes the initiative. God made his plan of salvation before anyone asked him to. Jesus died on the cross without anyone asking him to. God's Spirit went to work in your heart to bring you to faith before you asked him to. Genuine love always takes the initiative. If you have been involved in an argument, whether you were right or wrong or half of each, love looks like seeking to be reconciled. If you see someone in need, whether you know them or not, whether they have been good to you or not, love looks like seeking to bless them.

Second, love is practical. It cannot ignore the needs of a brother or sister. "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:17-18). Again, this is God-like love. Jesus did not only see your greatest need; he met your greatest need. Still today, your Father does not simply know what you need; he provides it (Matthew 6:28-32). And again, this is challenging. We say we love God, and we sing his praise on a Sunday and gather together for Bible study in the week, and we know our doctrine; but then the Bible says, *How is your love? Can it be seen in what you do?*

Third, love forgives. "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). How easy it is for us to say, or think, "I'm prepared to forgive if..." or "I'm prepared to forgive once they..." They need to say sorry first. They need to show me they really mean it first. But love covers over a multitude of sins. Not that those sins don't matter or that there are not necessarily consequences for them—

but love does not hold wrong against the wrongdoer nor withhold blessing from the wrongdoer. Love does not make forgiveness conditional upon performance. God came and sought me out when I was not looking for him, and he forgave all my sins when I did not deserve it (and he still does, every day), and if I will not forgive someone, then I am saying that I don't love God enough to love them. The key to forgiveness is to be overwhelmed by God's love, because God's love is expressed in forgiveness of others.

Fourth, love is not so much about feelings as it is about decisions and actions. To paraphrase John Stott, love is not a victim of our emotions but a servant of our wills.⁵ Love will affect our feelings, but it is not based on our feelings and it does not fluctuate with our feelings. This is why the Bible can exhort us to love. It is not asking us to change our feelings but to make a decision, depend on the Spirit, and take the action we're called to. We can pray that our feelings would catch up with our will, but we are not led by our feelings.

Fifth, love is the permanent priority of the Christian life. This is Paul's great point—and warning—in that famous passage in 1 Corinthians 13, a passage which is great to read at a wedding but has not really got anything to do with a wedding because it is about the church. The Corinthian church was a gifted, confident, divisive church. And in the middle of seeking to straighten it all out, Paul says to them (my paraphrase):

You speak with the tongues of men and angels
but don't have love? You might as well be a gong

5 John R.W. Stott, *Christ the Liberator* (InterVarsity USA, 1971), p.59.

or a clanging cymbal. You have prophetic powers, and you understand the whole Bible, and you're very knowledgeable; you have faith; you can move mountains—but no love? You're nothing! You're a very practical Christian. You give away all that you have. You're prepared to deliver up your body to be burned, but you don't have love? Nothing!

Love, then, is the nonnegotiable of the Christian life. With it, all else grows and flourishes. Without it, all else is useless. This supernatural love is not ours by inheritance or temperament, by background or effort. It is not achieved by going on a course or reading a book (including this one!). It is the work of God's Spirit, and he grows it as he sets our gaze on Jesus—on God's love for us in his Son. It is a supernatural love that we need, and that our families and churches and communities need, and it flows out of knowing and appreciating and enjoying God's love for us. Love is all we need; and love is what the Spirit grows.