



Jan Pierce

I've titled this set of devotionals, "Living in the Spirit: Bearing Fruit in Times of Discord." Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control: Paul tells us in Galatians 5 there is no law against such things. If we're living by the Spirit of God, we'll produce them in our daily lives.

We live in turbulent times. The divisions among us and all around us might nearly be construed as life in a time of war. It is an anxious, unsettling time in which cold walls of disagreement separate and divide. In such times we desperately need the leading of the Spirit because we can't afford to live in the poverty that is life apart from God's guidance.

How do we order our days to allow God's Spirit to thrive in us, producing his fruit, amid troubling times? If you're like me, you'll go to great lengths to avoid conflict. But there is also a time to speak the truth and stand for God's justice. May we all bear good fruit.

I'm a retired teacher, wife of fifty years, mother to two, and grandmother to four. My husband and I live in Vancouver, Washington, and attend Grace and Glory Community Church.

BIBLE READING: Ecclesiastes 12:8-14

The book of Ecclesiastes is an interesting, often confusing book. The teacher, whom most scholars believe to be Solomon, has experienced all life has to offer—wealth, success, and luxury—yet in retrospect he labels them all vanity. If we seek happiness, it becomes empty. If we work hard for material goods, they vanish, and the end for each of us is death. What is life all about?

Life can seem meaningless with no justice in sight. We ask with the teacher, “Is that all there is?” Yet this book, taken as a whole, does offer hope. It concludes with this message: “Fear God and keep his commandments....For God will bring every deed into judgment.” The book points us to the arrival of Jesus who brings abundant life. I thank God that Jesus brings resolution to all our questions and that he gives us hope for life’s circumstances.

Do you know anyone who has lost hope? Who merely endures life rather than living with joy and purpose? Now, more than ever, we need to offer messages of hope. There is truth, there will be justice, and we live to serve a loving God who invites everyone into his kingdom.

Life in the kingdom is marked by good fruit. Members are known by the love they exhibit. Their daily lives are filled with goodness and joy, and they share freely, living faithfully and generously.

Whom do you know who needs a message of hope today?

SONG: How Firm a Foundation

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, in times of division and strife, I look to you for truth. I trust you to judge. Show me how to live day by day.

—Jan Pierce

BIBLE READING: 1 John 4:15-19

Hatred and violence are everyday stories in our broken world. Less common is the response of mourners who openly forgive in the midst of their heartbreak. From all over the globe, we hear stories of people whose lives have been shattered by the loss of loved ones through careless acts of others as well as by purposeful acts of violence.

Yet we continue to read stories of families, congregations, and individuals who withhold judgment and offer forgiveness instead, even in the face of evil intent. These stories include mothers adopting the killers of their sons, neighborhoods coming alongside the family of the man who murdered their children, men and women making the decision to let love and forgiveness be the rule of their response to others.

How did they move from horror and grief to this amazing position of love? Where did they find the courage to move beyond their own pain to respond to the needs of the perpetrator? There's only one answer: God. When we truly comprehend the condition of all people, we realize we're floundering in the same soup. We're all flawed and sinful. Our only saving grace is the cleansing we receive through Jesus' sacrifice. We stand on common ground and it's this understanding that frees us to forgive.

When it's hard to love, when our hearts might churn with hate, that's when we need to remember that we share common ground with every person on earth. We share the lostness, the utter selfishness, the bent toward destruction—all washed away by the sacrifice of our Lord.

SONG: Beneath the Cross of Jesus

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Dear God, thank you for making a way for us to be free of sin. Work in me a forgiving heart.

—Jan Pierce

BIBLE READING: Romans 12:1-10

The votes had been counted. Two couples were the only dissenting voices. It had been the first church business meeting I'd ever attended, and I wondered how the "losers" would respond. The church would move ahead to add on a multipurpose room, a big undertaking for a small church of 120 people.

Several weeks went by. I kept my eyes open to see how the pro-builders and the no-builders would relate to one another. Strangely, I didn't see anything out of the ordinary. Everyone was open, friendly, and loving as usual. Surely there would be some undercurrents of emotion, I thought. Strong opinions had been voiced at that meeting, and it must have been uncomfortable when the vote was taken. I listened for the gossip and grumbling that was surely lurking below the surface of this too-smooth pond.

The first Saturday workday arrived. My husband and I showed up to see men already hard at work, removing old shingles from the existing roof. I looked up into the faces of the two men who had voted against the project. I was amazed. More than amazed, I was stunned. These men should have been angry and resentful. They'd lost! But there they were with the rest of the crew—and they even seemed happy!

I learned an important lesson that day about brotherly love and peacemaking. Yes, the two men had lost the vote, but they weren't losers. They'd chosen to respond to disappointment in love. They valued relationships with their church family over their own opinions. They honored the body, and as they did, they honored the Lord.

SONG: They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, teach me to love others as you do.

—Jan Pierce

BIBLE READING: Romans 8:18-26

I was an elementary school teacher for over thirty years. I used to joke that “I’ve never known a second grade boy who didn’t want to be first in line, even if he was on his way to the principal’s office.” Being first, making sure we get our fair share, elbowing our way to the front of a line, all of those actions expose one part of our sinful nature—the “me first” syndrome.

Most of us are impatient. We hate to wait, but waiting is part of everyday life. We wait in grocery store lines, bank teller lines, and we wait in doctor’s offices. We wait in heavy traffic and at stop lights. We wait for laboratory results and for news that our loved ones have arrived home safely.

Waiting is hard.

Waiting can be a kind of suffering, and whether we like it or not, it refines our character. It helps us realize we’re not the most important person in any given situation. And why are we in such a hurry? Waiting slows us down—gets in our way. We don’t like it. But waiting has its benefits. It points us toward an eternal mindset. After all, we believers are awaiting the most important event in all of history—Jesus’ triumphant return.

Next time impatience tenses your body and assaults your peaceful mind, remember that all of our life is about the anticipation of the full restoration of our fallen world. It’s OK if we slow down our daily lives a bit and relax. God has it all under control, and his restoration will only come about in his perfect timing.

SONG: I Wait for the Lord (Jeremy Camp)

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, teach me to slow down and trust you. Give me patience to wait for your perfect timing.

—Jan Pierce

BIBLE READING: James 3:1-12

Have you seen the meme of the little girl who holds a sharp stick to the neck of a little boy? The caption is, "I'm not bossy, I've got skills!" I well remember the day all of my kindergarten friends chose to pack up and go home rather than continue playing in my back yard. My mother's response to my tears was, "Well, if you weren't so bossy, maybe they would have stayed."

Ouch! It takes a lot of self-control to manage both our thoughts and our tongues. And in this day of technology, when we can tell hundreds and thousands of folks exactly what we think, the danger of bruised relationships and hurt feelings is even greater. It takes self-control to keep our oh-so-important opinions to ourselves.

When we want to call out those we find in error, Jesus says, "Stop, rethink. What would the loving response be?" When we want to prove ourselves right and neatly put another in his or her place, Jesus says a soft answer is the better response.

I want to find the right balance between speaking the truth in love and discerning when saying nothing is even better. The fact is, most people don't change their minds because they're bombarded with facts. They change when they develop a relationship with another person, begin to trust that person, and then open themselves to new ways of thinking.

My bossy little self probably had some really great ideas (skills). And my friends might have stuck around to enjoy them if I'd been able to be a better friend. All it would have taken was a little self-control.

SONG: I Need Thee Every Hour

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, lead me day by day. Help me to surrender my will, and instead, seek yours.

—Jan Pierce

BIBLE READING: Psalm 31:19-24

The reporter interviewed the old woman on her one-hundredth birthday. She sat in a wooden-backed chair, her simple house-dress harkening back to earlier days. She held her hands in her lap, clasping them gently. Her face wore the furrows of time, but when she spoke, her eyes lit up with intelligence and wit. The corners of her mouth drew up in a smile. She was beautiful.

The newsman held a sheaf of notes. He knew the woman before him had suffered. She'd lost two husbands, and a child had died in infancy. She'd been poor, often working several jobs to support her children. Now they were grown and had moved away to follow jobs and their own dreams. To all appearances she was alone in her old age.

But the woman had a different story to tell. "I was loved by two good men. I had five beautiful children, and one is already safe with the Lord. I have a comfortable place to live and plenty of food to eat. I have my church, my friends, and I have Jesus."

The young man started to ask a question, "But what about the struggles..." She cut him off: "Young man, I've lived one hundred years. God has blessed me in every one of them." She paused, "Here is your story: I've had a good, good life."

What a lesson in godliness. God's goodness shouts to us from every corner of the world. We have only to look in the right places.

SONG: Taste and See

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father in heaven, give me eyes to see your goodness all around me.

—Jan Pierce

BIBLE READING: Proverbs 25:8-12, 28

The lyrics to Alison Krauss's song, "When You Say Nothing at All," float through my head. But instead of the soft love song, I'm pondering a near-broken relationship.

Normally I'm not much interested in the political world except as it bears on issues of social justice. I barely pay attention to the antics of a political election.

But this time was different. I had strong opinions, and I voiced them. To make matters worse, many of my sisters and brothers in the Lord live at the opposite end of the political spectrum from me. I was walking in dangerous territory.

Our best friends for over forty years live at the other end of that spectrum, and we were due to spend a few days with them at the beach. However, they let us know they weren't sure they wanted to be with me if I was so adamant about my position.

I was both angry and sad. Yes, I'd stated my opinions. No, I hadn't posted ugly comments or mean-spirited barbs. Yet these friends of so many years, more like family, thought I'd make the visit uncomfortable. Would I?

I fussed and fumed, but eventually resolved to put my priorities in order. I love them. I won't change their opinions through argument. It would be best if I just said nothing at all and continued to honor the relationship above my opinions.

That's what I did, and we had a lovely time together. The process wasn't easy, and I haven't changed my mind. But my inner peace is restored, and the relationship is intact. Love always wins.

SONG: O, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, you modeled sacrificial love. Give me the courage to choose love, even when there is a cost.

—Jan Pierce