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Preparing the Ground for Nourishing the Fruits of the Spirit

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This paper examines the ways in which carers and/or ministers can prepare the ground for the fruits of the Spirit to be nourished in people in their care, especially those that explore hope and authentic Christian understanding of forgiveness.

The fruits of the Spirit are nine facets of the mind of Christ, and are listed by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.¹ They are the opposite of the fruits of the false self,² listed in Galatians 5:19-21: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies.³ The fruits of the Spirit grow together with the virtues of faith, hope, and love (charity).⁴

The view presented here is that to prepare the ground is to help parishioners to *recognize* where there may be spiritual lacks in their lives. Once these are recognized, and thus the ground prepared, parishioners can be nourished in the fruits of the Spirit. This occurs through *cultivating* certain attitudes and dispositions.

¹ Thomas Keating, *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit* (New York: Lantern Books, 2000), 15; *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 1985), 1787.

² Thomas Keating defines the false self as “the self developed in our own likeness rather than in the likeness of God” in *Foundations for Centering Prayer and the Christian Contemplative Life: Open Mind, Open Heart; Invitation to Love; The Mystery of Christ* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 243.

³ Keating, *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit*, 16; *NIV Study Bible*, 1787.

⁴ *Ibid.* The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:13, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love” (*NIV Study Bible*, 1752).

Preparing the Ground

To prepare the ground for the fruits of Spirit to be nourished, certain lacks need to be first recognized. Fourteen limiting dispositions are described as follows:

Recognize and accept that alone one is spiritually powerless. The foremost fact people need to know about themselves is that they are unable to do any lasting spiritual work under their own power. Each person remains totally dependent on the divine Spirit.⁵ They must come to realize how unmanageable their lives are, as well as how helpless they are to practice the virtues and to bear the fruits of the Spirit.⁶

Recognize that self-seeking love toward others is confining and limiting. By nature, humans have a powerful self-seeking love that the Greeks called *eros*.⁷ Due to its self-seeking nature, this love inevitably causes a person to inwardly despise others. Personality or character defects, for example, cause difficulty and may result in a desire to stay as far away as possible.⁸ Individualities, opinionatedness, hang-ups, faults, and sins in others become repulsive.⁹ Furthermore, people over-identify with their particular family, ethnic, national, and religious group”¹⁰

⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰ Ibid., 18.

*Recognize the need to be liberated from the false self.*¹¹ Keating describes the false self as the self-image developed to cope with the traumas of early childhood, which seeks happiness in satisfying the instinctual needs of survival/security, affection/esteem, and power/control, and which bases its self-worth on cultural or group identification.¹² (By contrast, the true self is “the image of God in which every human being is created; our participation in the divine life manifested in our uniqueness”.¹³) And so, in relation to joy, for example, the false self does not have the freedom to accept the present moment and its content without trying to change it.¹⁴ Consequently, a state of bliss, or fullness of joy,¹⁵ is never experienced.

Recognize and be aware of one’s own nothingness¹⁶ and insignificance. Without such a perspective, and the resulting lack of peace, one is unable to successfully endure the ups and downs of life, which include the range of emotions from joy to sorrow.¹⁷

*Recognize that one’s security is not based on possessions or accomplishments.*¹⁸ Without such perception, and resultant lack of patience, one is unavoidably disturbed by the ebb and flow of human events and one’s emotional reactions to them.¹⁹

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Thomas Keating, *Foundations for Centering Prayer and the Christian Contemplative Life: Open Mind, Open Heart; Invitation to Love; The Mystery of Christ* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 243.

¹³ Ibid., 250.

¹⁴ Keating, *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit*, 18.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 21-22.

¹⁹ Ibid., 22.

*Recognize the need to free oneself from the energy of hostility, hatred, or anger.*²⁰ Of and by oneself, one cannot accept others as they are, and often there is a deep underlying dissatisfaction with oneself.

Recognize the illusion or deep sense of separateness from the universe and everything created. For that reason, the creation is not always affirmed as good, and not all events are grasped as manifestations of God’s love.²¹ Accordingly, gratitude to God does not abound in the heart and a positive attitude does not characterize one’s relationship with others.²²

*Recognize one’s continual desire for affirmation and human approval.*²³ Consequently, one serves God and dwells on what God or others will do for oneself, or gives with thinking of a return.²⁴

*Recognize one’s anxious efforts to serve God.*²⁵ Paradoxically, vanity, jealousy, and contention often accompany even one’s spiritual endeavours.²⁶

*Recognize that self-control is not simply one’s will dominating over the emotions.*²⁷ Humanly, there is a compulsive reaching out for security, esteem, and control.²⁸ A person

²⁰ Ibid., 19.

²¹ Ibid., 21.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 20.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 21.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 22.

²⁸ Ibid.

cannot appreciate that in spite of personal weakness, God will grant the strength to get through every trial and temptation.²⁹

*Recognize that a “tragic” view of life encourages negative emotions.*³⁰ With a tragic perception, “emotional engagement with hardship” is encouraged.³¹ The associated emotions are negative, such as sadness, anger, and fear. They trigger unhappy feelings and interfere with reaching goals and living a fulfilling life.³² Moreover, a person is unable to see things in the big picture and from other people’s perspectives.³³

*Recognize that unforgiveness impairs the health of one’s spirit.*³⁴ Living in unforgiveness, and holding on to hurts or grudges, saps one’s psychological and spiritual energy, paving the way for negativity, cynicism, passive aggressiveness, and spiritual ennui.³⁵ As Malone states, “a part of me dies when I hold on to a hurt or a grudge for years and years – perhaps my self-esteem, my spontaneity, my laughter, my energy, my dreams.”³⁶ Cassidy concurs by writing that “I can only say: however much we have been wronged, however justified our hatred, if we cherish it, it will poison us. Our heart will become bitter and our vision clouded and our love will wither away.”³⁷

²⁹ Ibid., 23.

³⁰ John Morreall, *Comedy, Tragedy and Religion* (New York: University of New York Press, 1999), 148.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 150.

³⁴ Peter Van Breeman, *The God Who Won’t Let Go* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2001), 60.

³⁵ Janet Malone, “Forgive But Don’t Forget”, *Human Development* 15:2 (Summer 1994): 6.

³⁶ Ibid., 7.

³⁷ Sheila Cassidy, “Seventy Times Seven”, *The Tablet* (March 2, 1991): 268.

Recognize costly consequences of alienation. In the parable of the prodigal son, the vocabulary of the young man who had separated himself, describes loneliness, hunger, and need.³⁸ Indeed, alienation always involves rupture, fragmentation, isolation, and exclusion.³⁹ In other words, the cost of alienation is high and includes loneliness and emptiness, as well as no communication and no relationships.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the other who is different is categorized as on the ‘outside’, the ‘stranger’, the ‘unwanted’, the ‘sinner’, or the ‘enemy’.⁴¹

*Recognize that despair may be necessary to internally redefine a person.*⁴² Despair involves a cycle of struggle – change, isolation, darkness, fear, powerlessness, vulnerability, exhaustion, and scarring.⁴³ From this cycle, writes Chittister, “new strength and a new sense of self, new compassion and a new sense of the purpose of life” arises.⁴⁴

Nourishing the Fruits of the Spirit

Having prepared the ground for the fruits of the Spirit by recognizing a number of spiritual lacks, these lacks can be cultivated to produce the fruits of the Spirit.

³⁸ Van Breeman, *The God Who Won't Let Go*, 66.

³⁹ David Ranson, *A Hunger for Reconciliation* (Strathfield, NSW, Australia: St. Paul's Publications, 2004), 55.

⁴⁰ Van Breeman, *The God Who Won't Let Go*, 63.

⁴¹ Ranson, *A Hunger for Reconciliation*, 57.

⁴² Joan Chittister, *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 92.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

*Cultivate allowing the Spirit to be the source of one’s actions.*⁴⁵ When a person is not available to the Spirit, they think that the Spirit is absent from them.⁴⁶ In reality, however, the Spirit is continually present to one’s inmost being.⁴⁷ It invites each person to let go of their self-centred agendas and to allow the Spirit to be the source of their actions at every level.⁴⁸ With such trustful dependence on the Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit are experienced and manifested⁴⁹

*Cultivate accepting by faith that the divine Presence dwells in every human being.*⁵⁰ “Faith in God’s presence in others allows one to accept others” notes Keating.⁵¹ This faith in the fact that God is there is based on a truth that cannot be immediately seen or felt, but only believed.⁵² As a result, *eros*, the self-seeking love, grows into self-giving love which is the “participation in God’s unconditional love.”⁵³ The love of God, poured forth into the heart by the Holy Spirit (see Rom 5:5), goes on showing love, no matter what happens and even in the face of opposition and persecution.⁵⁴

Cultivate a growing awareness of the presence of God. The true self is capable of the continual awareness of the tender and loving presence of God.⁵⁵ In view of that, there can be “an abiding sense of well-being based on the experience of a conscious relationship with

⁴⁵ Keating, *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit*, 14.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 17-18; Romans 5:5 states, “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (NIV, page 1712).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

God.”⁵⁶ Keating further states it is also “the abiding sense of being loved by God and of being permanently established in his presence.”⁵⁷

*Cultivate a pervasive sense of contentment from being rooted in God.*⁵⁸ “At the deepest level,” notes Keating, “one can know that all is well, that everything is just right despite all appearances to the contrary.”⁵⁹ In all circumstances, one can pray as Jesus did, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Lk 23:46).⁶⁰

*Cultivate assurance in God’s unwavering faithfulness to his promises.*⁶¹ This leads to a conviction that one’s security is based on God’s unfailing protection.⁶² A person can wait, therefore, with confidence for God’s deliverance in every situation, including long periods of dryness.”⁶³ Further, the words of Jesus have been internalized: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7).⁶⁴

*Cultivate the acceptance of everyone with their limitations.*⁶⁵ Through the indwelling Spirit, one can accept others as they are, being ready to help whenever possible – but without trying to, or setting about to, change them.⁶⁶ Equally important, as Keating concludes, one can be “content with one’s inability to change oneself as one would like while continuing to do

⁵⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ *NIV Study Bible*, 1587.

⁶¹ Keating, *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit*, 21.

⁶² Ibid., 22.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.; *NIV Study Bible*, 1452.

⁶⁵ Keating, *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit*, 19.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 20.

what one can to improve, relying more and more upon God and less and less on one’s own efforts.”⁶⁷

*Cultivate perceiving events as manifestations of God’s love.*⁶⁸ Such an outlook includes even the tragic experiences of life.⁶⁹ Furthermore, this perspective can recognize the beauty of all creation, in spite of the damage that human selfishness has imposed on it.⁷⁰

*Cultivate a conviction of being loved by God.*⁷¹ This involves the daily offering of oneself, and all of one’s actions, “to God out of compassion for others, especially in service of their concrete needs.”⁷² It serves without looking for a personal return or reward.

*Cultivate God’s way of doing things that is both gentle and firm.*⁷³ One labours, notes Keating, “in the service of God more than ever, and yet [has] the sense of stepping back and watching God make things happen according to his will both in ourselves and in others.”⁷⁴ In other words, one labours and is at rest at the same time⁷⁵ – one works hard, but knows by experience, “that [one’s] efforts are not going to go anywhere except insofar as God makes them fruitful.”⁷⁶ As a result, this gives immense freedom to be who one is and to serve the special needs of those around.⁷⁷

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 20.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 20-21.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

*Cultivate awareness of God’s abiding presence resulting from the infusion of God’s steadfast love.*⁷⁸ When a person is inwardly assured of God’s unwavering love, it enhances their freedom of choice and action – and “out of that interior liberty, self-control arises spontaneously”.⁷⁹

Cultivate the virtue of humour and laughter. To nourish the fruits of the Spirit, responding to difficulties with humour is often better than reacting with tragic emotions.⁸⁰ Humour blocks tragic emotions, such as fear, anger, and sadness with their potential harmfulness.⁸¹ Moreover, humour fosters a number of virtues such as tolerance, humility, patience, forgiveness, magnanimity, empathy, yieldedness, grace, courage, cooperation, balance, acceptance, and self-detachment.⁸² Laughter, experienced with other people, states Pattison, can generate warmth, mutuality, sharing and solidarity – in other words, “humour can cement people together in a unique way, helping them to realize that they are not on their own in the situations they face.”⁸³

Cultivate the grace of forgiveness. While love proves its authenticity in fidelity, it reaches its completion in forgiveness.⁸⁴ To cultivate forgiveness, a process is involved in which a person names, owns, and blesses their pain and hurt, and then moves on.⁸⁵ In naming one’s hurt and pain, there is movement away from denying and forgetting the event, thinking

⁷⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 22-23.

⁸⁰ Morreall, *Comedy, Tragedy and Religion*, 150.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 152-154.

⁸³ Stephen Pattison, *Critique of Pastoral Care* (London: SCM Press, 1988), 184.

⁸⁴ Van Breeman, *The God Who Won’t Let Go*, 65.

⁸⁵ Malone, “Forgive But Don’t Forget”, 6.

the event was not that bad, or believing that the event was deserved.⁸⁶ Owning one’s hurt and pain consists of fully feeling the emotions involved, accepting that it is normal to feel emotions of pain, taking personal responsibility for emotions, not condoning or denying the pain, and recognizing the role of one’s own interpretation of events.⁸⁷ Finally, the blessing stage of forgiveness involves integrating the hurt into one’s life, focusing on responding to life, and living fully in the present.⁸⁸

Ultimately, writes Cassidy, “forgiveness comes as a gift which we receive freely and not by right. We in turn give it by God’s great grace, not by our own power.”⁸⁹ A person cannot forgive at will, nor can they demand of others that they forgive those who have wronged them.⁹⁰ Finally, one can only humbly ask for forgiveness for oneself, or for the power to forgive others, and then wait in hope and trust that it will be given.⁹¹

Cultivate a reconciliatory spirit. This is based on the anchor of one’s salvation that God has already reconciled humans to himself.⁹² It is, as Breemen reassures, a “love is based on nothing, and sets no conditions . . . we are fully accepted and heartily welcomed.”⁹³ Clearly then, reconciliation must rest on repentance from the instinct for revenge and on a respect for the otherness of the other.⁹⁴ It involves restoration, wholeness, hospitality, communion, and embrace.⁹⁵ However, the deeply paschal nature of reconciliation means that it is a process, and

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 7-8.

⁸⁹ Cassidy, “Seventy Times Seven”, 267.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Van Breeman, *The God Who Won’t Let Go*, 64. In this context, 2 Cor 5:18 is relevant: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ y and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (NIV).

⁹³ Ibid., 66.

⁹⁴ Ranson, *A Hunger for Reconciliation*, 62.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 56.

not an instant outcome.⁹⁶ Finally, reconciliation involves mutual forgiveness.⁹⁷ It is a process, states Malone, “in which the persons concerned experience enough mutual trust to come together in order to ask for and receive forgiveness from each other. . . in reciprocity there is a concomitant and ongoing willingness to continue this process of reconciliation.”⁹⁸

*Cultivate the view that hope involves a response to struggle and takes one from emotional despair to a total transformation of life.*⁹⁹ In responding to struggle, a process of hope emerges. Change turns into conversion; isolation becomes independence; darkness forms into faith; fear moves to courage; powerlessness is reclaimed as surrender; vulnerability transforms into self-acceptance; exhaustion reaches endurance; and the scarring becomes transformation.¹⁰⁰ Hope, reassures Chittister, “takes life on its own terms, knows that whatever happens God lives in it, and expects that, whatever its twists and turns, it will ultimately yield its good to those who live it consciously.”¹⁰¹ Finally, hope says “remember where you have been before and know that God is waiting for you someplace else now, to go on again to something new.”¹⁰²

Conclusion

This paper has shown that to prepare the ground for the fruits of the Spirit to be nourished in the lives of parishioners, certain deficient attitudes need to be first *recognized*

⁹⁶ Ibid., 65.

⁹⁷ Malone, “Forgive But Don’t Forget”, 5.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Chittister, *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope*, 97.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 96.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 106.

¹⁰² Ibid., 107.

and then the right dispositions correctly *cultivated*. Table 1 below summarizes the movement from preparing (recognition) to nourishing (cultivation).

Table 1. Preparing the Ground for Nourishing the Fruits of the Spirit

Prepare the ground by <i>recognizing</i> that one ...	Nourish the fruits of the Spirit by <i>cultivating</i> ...
Is spiritually powerless of and by oneself.	The Spirit: the source of one’s actions.
Has a limiting self-seeking love.	Love (charity): acceptance of the Divine Presence in every human being.
Needs to be liberated from the false self.	Joy: awareness of the presence of God.
Must be aware of one’s own nothingness.	Peace: a pervasive sense of contentment from being rooted in God.
Does not find ultimate security in possessions or accomplishments.	Patience (long-suffering): assurance in God’s unwavering faithfulness.
Has to be free from hostility, hatred, or anger.	Kindness (meekness): acceptance of everyone with their limitations.
Feels an illusion of separateness from God and the universe.	Goodness: seeing events as manifestations of God’s love.
Has a continual desire for human affirmation and approval.	Faithfulness (fidelity): conviction of being loved by God.
Experiences anxious efforts in serving God.	Gentleness: doing things that is at once gentle and firm.
Does not have self-control only through the will dominating the emotions.	Self-control: awareness of God’s abiding presence through the infusion of God’s love.
Is prone to negative emotions through a “tragic” view of life.	Humour: the virtues of the funny side and laughter.
Impairs the health of one’s spirit through unforgiveness.	Forgiveness: the grace of mercy and pardon.
Pays a high price for alienation.	Reconciliation: mutual forgiveness.
Must at times be internally redefined through despair.	Hope: moving toward a total transformation of life.

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