

Sweetness of Spirit:

A 5-Day Devotional for a Changed Demeanor



KELLY R BAKER

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by Kelly R. Baker

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THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE,
LONGSUFFERING, GENTLENESS, GOODNESS, FAITH,
MEEKNESS, TEMPERANCE: AGAINST SUCH THERE IS NO
LAW" GALATIANS 5:22-23 KJV



SWEETNESS OF SPIRIT: ATTACK OF THE KILLER KITCHEN

It was an ordinary day. I innocently entered my kitchen not knowing that it was going to attack me. Before my son helps me with the dishes I take the sharp knives out of the dishwasher and put them up high like a good mommy does. The home of the sharp knives, a plastic cylinder shaped bowl, was snuggled in its normal place in the upper cupboard. Instead of the knives landing in the bowl in the normal fashion, when I dropped them into place, they bounced out and performed a somersault toward my face. I quickly stepped back away from the flying knives. Stunned. Grateful that my face didn't look like I was related to Edward Scissorhands.

Unsettled, I decided to make a cup of my green tea. Comfort food. My son began to silently unload the dishwasher. I reached for one of my favorite china mugs in an upper cabinet just beside the open dishwasher. With cup in hand I turned around, tripped on my son and fell into the upper rack of the dishwasher beside me, bounced down to the lower rack, and finally to the floor. My sole thought was that I couldn't break that china mug in my hand. It didn't receive a scratch. I, on the other hand, received three bruises. One was scary enough to win a lawsuit against my appliance, which has nothing against dishes, only people.

I went to my office chair to sulk and nurse my wounds. I thought my husband would come to investigate the outrageous crash that was the result of my fall. He later informed me that he just thought it was the boys. I was too humiliated to talk about being a victim attacked by a bully dishwasher anyway.

Why was this happening to me? I didn't do anything wrong, God. I wondered. I used to tease my husband when "things" happen, "You know, God allowed that to happen to you as a test to see how you would respond."

Well, how did I respond? I didn't get mad. Check. Hmm... My kitchen is haunted.

After dinner I hadn't forgotten about the kitchen events of the day, but I had to put the remaining white chicken chili in the freezer. I grabbed a freezer baggie like a good granddaughter does, since my grandma put everything "in a baggie" after Thanksgiving Dinner one year. Spooning the soup into the bag, I was lost in thought when suddenly the bag slipped from my hand and half the contents raced out onto the edge of the countertop, down the side, and splattered on the floor. I. Was. Angry!

It also made its way into the drawer under the countertop and into the cabinet below that. I was really mad now. There was no sweetness in my spirit at that moment. All that poured out was complaining and smacking things around in a huff.

You know God allowed that to happen to you as a test to see how you would respond... the devil mocked me.

Oh, shut up!

After solemn reflection, and biblical counseling mixed with a little prayer therapy, I'm not so traumatized every time I go in the kitchen now. Since I have to be in that particular room many times in a given day, I have a strategy. If my nerves become the least bit edgy I will purchase a football uniform complete with padding to wear under my apron.

What I want to know is, why did my guardian angel go on break? ;)

What Is Sweetness of Spirit?

That's a humorous story, but it reminded me that I didn't have sweetness of spirit during trying moments.

Living yielded to God isn't easy, but obedience results in fruitfulness and growth.

Before I began surrendering minor moments of my day like this to the Holy Spirit, I let circumstances wreck my self-control. And the end result was just like this verse says:

A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls. Proverbs 25:28 ESV

I allowed the enemy to take the victory. But God is patient, and He began inviting me to yield to His shaping in those instances when my flesh would have rather remained stubborn.

My mother first introduced me to the phrase "sweetness of spirit" several years ago. When our lives are pleasurable to others because they're filled with the fruit of the Spirit, we could then be described as having a sweetness of spirit.

Fruit will ripen to just that perfect sweetness, leaving a delectable taste in your mouth. Just like eating a good piece of fruit means happy taste buds, I wanted my life to leave a good taste in your mouth.

RESPOND: Father, I understand that learning to live yielded to You isn't easy, but I desire to see sweetness of spirit in my life. When I yield to You and obey, I will grow and produce live-giving fruit. That will bring You glory. Begin the work in me today. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Living yielded to God isn't easy, but obedience results in
fruitfulness and growth.*



DAY 1, SWEETNESS OF SPIRIT: THE IMPRESSION YOUR LIFE LEAVES

Okay, I'm just going to spill it:

My spirit man was definitely not producing a sweetness. For years I had responded to life in the wrong way. I had, of course, heard and even learned about the fruit of the Spirit. You don't grow up in the church without being taught about that! But I had a foolish habit of ignoring the application of it to my life, more accurately, the way I reacted to my life.

Growing up I was toughened in my spirit since I ignored the moments He wanted to shape me. I said what I wanted, and my speech wasn't tactful. I frequently put my foot in my mouth long before I knew it. I argued with my parents and my brother and the friends that I could keep. When I was asked to help with something at home I whined or did it with a bad attitude. My sour responses had taken over my life and was so thoroughly ingrained that I could not see myself.

What robbed the sweetness? Hatred, depression, worry, impatience, harshness, anger, pride... Every time I reacted with one of those, my spirit kept turning sour, until one day I was known only for my selfishness. I think I left a bad taste in others' mouths more than I didn't.

After the day that I came back to Jesus and truly started surrendering my ways for His, the Lord used my dear mom to introduce a concept that was foreign to me: sweetness of spirit. I was finally ready to "find out what is acceptable to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8-10 NKJV). I wasn't happy with myself.

I had bitterly held up the mirror and was sickened by the reflection of my soured spirit mocking me.

“When bitterness is exhausted sweetness will follow.” — *Author unknown*

I asked God to change me to produce His fruit of the Spirit. That was the beginning of learning to live yielded to Him.

Fruit will ripen to just that perfect sweetness, leaving a delectable taste in your mouth. Just like eating a good piece of fruit means happy taste buds, I wanted my life to leave a good taste in your mouth.

Unpacking the Application

It takes humility to admit we are in need of change. I encourage you to be swift to hear the Spirit right now and slow to speak any excuses that may be coming to mind. I might’ve experienced that a time or two. ;)

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:19-20 NKJV).

KEY VERSE: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23 KJV).

WRITE THE KEY VERSE:

BOLD PRAYER: Ask God to show you if you are responding to the people, events, and circumstances in your life the way He wants you to respond.

RESPOND: Are you willing to ask God what is an acceptable response in your life? Write a prayer asking Him for this.

What do you want the impression of your life to be? Write a detailed answer.

Your life leaves an impression.



DAY 2, SWEETNESS OF SPIRIT: CHASING THE WRONG RESPONSE

****NOTE**** While reading the stories from the next couple of days, it may have come across that it was always like that between my brother and me. It wasn't. We had many laughs, and many more good times than silly, sibling rivalries. Additionally, this was decades ago. ;) We get along very well and love each other very much.

My older brother, TJ, and I became very close during our childhood years. As a matter of fact, I was often close on his heels. You see, TJ was an expert at aggravating me. I could always depend on him to be by my side. He would enjoy goofing off from doing our chores just to bother me. He would continue aggravating me in an effort to provoke me to swing at him, a good way for him to start a “play” fight with me.

Calling me names, he would pull my hair, hit me, or try to trip me. I'd scramble after him around the coffee table, behind the sofa, over the sitting chair; I couldn't catch him because he was excellent at dodging, and he ran much faster than me. He knew that he was so good at faking me out that he kept on until I would trip on something and come crashing to the floor:

"What a dork!" TJ pointed his finger at me while laughing hilariously.

"Shut up!" I retorted in my irritation, too exhausted to get revenge.

"Shut up!" he mocked me in a pouting voice.

My brother never failed to surprise me with his sensational dedication to practicing his instrument while he was learning to play the drums. Since he loved to play drums so much, he would beat on any flat surface available like the wall, the door, the table, his thighs, etc.

I remember one day when I was in the kitchen eating a snack during a relaxing break when TJ sat down and began his inevitable beating, this time unfortunately on the top of my head:

"Will you please stop beating on everything? You're making me lose my mind!" I said, exasperated.

"I didn't know you had one," TJ laughed.

"MOM!" I yelled, chasing after him.

The times we spent together, even folding towels was unlike any other brother-sister relationship. We'd be folding towels when he would "pop" me with a towel:

"Ouch!" I screamed out, "That hurt, you meany!"

"You poor baby," TJ whimpered. "OK, OK, I promise I won't do it again."

We continued folding towels. A few minutes later when I had my back turned, "POP!" and the chase began again. He took every opportunity to aggravate me. While I was getting ready for bed, TJ would patiently knock on the bathroom door and ask, "Aren't you done primping for your pillow yet?"

Numerous times growing up I had the chance to respond with patience, but I failed every. single. time. Instead of allowing God to work long-suffering in me, I became a short fuse to irritation. I didn't turn to the Word of God to counsel me during those times. Instead, I became a tough tomboy on the outside with a calloused spirit on the inside.

Unpacking the Application

God may desire to begin a new work in you concerning chasing the wrong response. In my case, it was revenge. But what does your life look like? Ponder that for a moment and respond

to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Write what God shows you in your journal. It will be a gold nugget to go back to later.

KEY VERSE: “And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:4 CSB).

WRITE THE KEY VERSE:

BOLD PRAYER: As we go through the next few days, ask God to give you a revelation about sweetness of spirit.

RESPOND:

How do you respond when others get on your last nerve?

Have you turned to the counsel of the Word of God when you find you aren't responding correctly? List a specific example.

Chase the right response.



DAY 3, SWEETNESS OF SPIRIT: MINDFUL OF THE MOMENTS

My older brother, TJ and I grew up in the hills of Tennessee. We were homeschooled for part of that time and sometimes only had each other for near-age companionship. Despite his occasional tendency to aggravate, we were best friends. He schooled me in two-hand touch football, and I made him play “house” with me. Well, that was rare. Actually, I was usually the one following him around like a loyal puppy dog and joined right in with his and his friends’ daring escapades.

I was a scrawny eight year old, but I learned to be tough. The boys built a bike ramp at the top of the hill. The idea was to hit it at the right speed and soar through the air, thumping down to glide through the trees all the way down to the bottom of the steep hill.

No one wanted to go first. Scaredy-cat cut-downs were being passed around when I piped up that I would go first. I think they were still figuring out what to do when they realized that I had already jumped the ramp and was triumphantly dodging trees down the hill.

The tomboy reputation continued. The boys were standing in the street talking smack and throwing out witty comebacks. The retorts were a funny game until I got involved. That day the boys walked away, beaten by the shortest comeback queen of the block. I even popped a boy across his jaw one day because he made me mad. He refused to fight with me, since I was a girl. (Looking back, I'm glad he didn't; he probably would have cleaned my clock!)

The circumstances surrounding my life cannot be blamed for crafting me. My foolish responses to my environment were crafting my attitudes. I remember gloating after those instances and trying to feel cool but felt uncomfortable inside.

Even as children we can be sensitive to the Lord, and deep inside I knew this unsettled feeling was trying to remind me of the way I was taught to act. Yet, **I pushed God out of the picture and ignored the moments that He would have worked sweetness of spirit in me.**

Unpacking the Application

God may desire to begin a new work in you concerning specific, detailed moments of your day where you can yield to His leading. Respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit and choose to walk in love. When He illuminates a specific moment, write what He shows you in your journal.

KEY VERSE: "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor" (Romans 12:10 ESV).

WRITE THE KEY VERSE:

BOLD PRAYER: Ask God to help you be mindful of the moments that He can work a sweetness of spirit in you.

RESPOND:

Do you blame your circumstances for the way you respond? If so, how can you make a different choice?

Are you paying attention to the moments that God would do a work in you? Is there a "moment" that comes to mind when the Holy Spirit impressed you to yield and you didn't? What happened?

Be mindful of the moments.



DAY 4, SWEETNESS OF SPIRIT: LET YOUR FRUIT RIPEN

God did a work in me— as I yielded. It was a process. And let me tell you: I haven't "arrived." God says the completed work isn't finished until Jesus returns.

"And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns" (Philippians 1:6 NLT).

But I'm so grateful that I'm not still at the beginning. I started listening to the Holy Spirit when my flesh wanted to rise up and whine, argue back or parade around with a sour attitude. He would whisper, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance..." (Galatians 5:22-23 KJV).

Easton's 1897 Bible Dictionary states that, "The fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23; Ephesians 5:9; James 3:17, 18) are those gracious dispositions and habits which the Spirit produces in those in whom he dwells and works."

The Spirit implores us to sow seeds in our trivial acts to produce sweetness of character. Opportunities never cease to present themselves, and as each chance would come, I consciously began to notice how I would respond.

Eventually, the times I consciously responded properly came closer together and the spiritual temper tantrums were less frequent. I started to experience the verse that says, "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones" (Proverbs 16:24 NKJV).

I was delightfully surprised at the realization that I had begun to look for ways I could be of help to someone other than myself!

The months went on and there were times I actually didn't argue back or allow irritation to rise up in me. I declared in joy (and some days, in feisty determination) that, "The fruit of the Spirit IS...it IS, as in now, as in the time we call the present, and it IS in me!"

Keeping free of the habits of the past are *only one* reason why we need to be before Him daily. There have been times, of course, that I failed and my sour response knocked me off my feet. As the years pass, I need reminding from Him. It's not easy, but I have to choose to let those reminders be a continual work toward sweetness of spirit.

Remember to celebrate the small incremental victories because when they are strung together, they equal spiritual growth.

“Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near” (Philippians 4:5 NASB).

Unpacking the Application

As you read this, you may have been drawn by the Spirit to allow Him to work a greater sweetness of spirit in you. If so, then rejoice. Let your fruit ripen by letting Him use the trivial, as well as the major, circumstances in your everyday life. We don't always see ourselves, so bravely ask those closest to you to point out your blind spots. Pull the planks and take the attitude reflected in the key verse below.

KEY VERSE: “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; That I may learn thy statutes” (Psalm 119:71 ASV).

WRITE THE KEY VERSE:

BOLD PRAYER: Ask God to help you be receptive and not defensive for any blind spots that others illuminate.

RESPOND:

Do you think that it matters how you respond with little, trivial actions as well as the bigger moments? Why?

Are you willing to let your fruit ripen into a sweetness of spirit from the little thoughts, attitudes, and actions? Write an example of one response that you could yield to God.

Let your fruit ripen.



DAY 5, SWEETNESS OF SPIRIT: GAINING A NEW REPUTATION

"Why do they still think of me the way I was three years ago? Can't they see I've changed?" I cried to the Lord one day. I remembered the heart-wrenching moments when I came to a place of surrender and allowed the Lord to work in me a heart change of pride to humility.

Nothing was more precious to me than seeing my own weaknesses transformed by the power of the Word. I walked in new places of strength as I let go of the sins that I had given into repeatedly. One thing was bothering me that day: *I* knew that God had worked some major changes, *God* certainly knew that I had matured as a Christian...why didn't *others* understand the same thing?

That's when I talked it over with my husband. I had given my heart to the Lord about 12 years prior to that day but had seen little change in my spiritual life until the last three. When I shared my grief with him, he said something that made my eyes grow wide with new understanding:

"You're not the one who holds your reputation. The other person is the one who holds a reputation *of* you, and it may or may not be accurate." — *Justin D. Baker*

The fact is, you are a new creature when you are saved, but you are also a work in progress. God is changing you in different areas as you continually grow and mature in Him.

You are *building* a new reputation. And with humans, sometimes that takes gaining their trust again.

In Matthew 12:33-34, you can see that you are known by your fruit, and you're going to speak what is in your heart good or bad. Others can't begin to see what is in your heart until you open your mouth. That's why you need to be talking about what God has done in you! Your testimony is a platform for those around you to see how you have been an overcomer.

Satan may use pride as a temptation to choke it out. Don't let him. Lay the pride aside, and let others know how God showed you specifically what was in you and that you repented.

It takes a lifetime to gain a favorable reputation, but only one act of foolishness can cause it to slip away. Wisdom needs to be applied when you share an intimate heart change. Paul did not hesitate to share his past, but he did not share it in every city to which he wrote.

You need the balance of being led by the Spirit. For example, maybe you did hate your sister because of envy, but sharing it could wreck the relationship. On the other hand, you may feel that you need to share it because God knows she suspected that of you and asked Him for evidence of a change of heart. The story of Joseph and his brothers comes to mind here.

Unpacking the Application

God is taking care of your new reputation. Give it all to Him. Let your focus be on what He thinks, not others. Let your mission be to complete whatever assignment He lays on your heart to advance His kingdom.

KEY VERSE: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10 ESV).

WRITE THE KEY VERSE:

BOLD PRAYER: Release thoughts of what people think of you and thank God for His favor. Ask Him what He wants you to do for Him.

RESPOND:

What can you share right now about a recent heart change God has worked in you?

Do you need to change your thinking towards someone because his reputation has preceded him? Write that person's name below and write a prayer asking God to help you change your thinking towards him/her.

God's in control of your new reputation.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kelly R. Baker

Kelly R. Baker is a Bible study teacher, writer, mentor, the founder of the Blogger Voices Network. She serves with her husband in leading the worship ministry at their church. You will probably find her sneaking a bite (or more) of organic dark chocolate in between wrangling her four homeschooled kids. She helps Christians go from stagnant in their walk with God to thriving in Christ. She promises if you live yielded to God, you'll see the fruit.

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