

Making GOD Smile

**Living the Fruit of the Spirit
One Day at a Time**

Kim Taylor Henry



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HELPING PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THE HEART OF GOD

eBook available wherever digital books are sold.

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file with the Library of Congress.

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ISBN: 978-1-68397-263-1

Cover Design by Jeff Jansen | AestheticSoup.net

Page Layout by Bart Dawson

Printed in the United States of America

18 19 20 21 22 LBM 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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CAN I REALLY MAKE GOD SMILE?

*I chose you and appointed you so that you might go
and bear fruit—fruit that will last.*

JOHN 15:16 NIV84

My fifteen-month-old granddaughter sat on the floor and picked up her sock. “Can you put it on?” her mother asked. Maddie attempted to stretch the material over her foot. She tugged to no avail, then switched feet.

“You’re doing such a good job!” her mother said, even though the sock’s opening still wasn’t welcoming Maddie’s toes. Maddie picked up her shoe, fiddled with its laces, and struggled unsuccessfully to put it on. Then she tried again.

“You’re doing great,” her father said.

My granddaughter never did get her socks or shoes on that day, but her parents smiled as they watched, because although Maddie didn’t achieve her goal, they knew she had tried. She wanted to please them; her heart was with them; she gave it her best.

That is what God asks of us. When we try to live as he calls us to live, we won’t always succeed. But if we want to please him, if our heart is with him, and we do our best, God—our heavenly Father—will smile. Eventually, we’ll likely get it right. And God will smile even more.

“But,” you may say, “I’m an adult, and I still haven’t gotten it right. How can my life make God smile?”

God’s concept of time is different from ours (2 Peter 3:8).

He loves us as a parent loves their child (1 John 3:1). He looks at our hearts (1 Samuel 16:7). He knows living his way is hard, even impossible, for us. That's why he sent Jesus to pay for our sins and the Holy Spirit to help us live a life filled with his fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23). God knows it's a journey. He's ready to walk with us every step of the way. And as he does, he'll smile.

Fruit here means the manner in which we live our lives. Everyone produces fruit of some kind, bad or good. Jesus tells us we're recognized by our fruit (Luke 6:44). By it, we demonstrate whether we're truly following Jesus or not.

After Jesus left this earth he sent God's Spirit to live in us who believe, to teach us and remind us of everything Jesus said (John 14:26; Romans 8:9–11). Through his Spirit also, we are given the ability to live his fruit. As Christians, we're to produce that fruit—to make it abundant in our lives. But, in our humanness, we're too weak to do that. We can do it only through the power given to us by God's Spirit.

For God's fruit is fruit of the *Spirit*, not fruit of the *believer*. To live it consistently, we need to follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives (Galatians 5:16). When we do, we will produce his fruit; we'll live the way he wants us to. When we ignore him and try to produce it alone, we'll still produce fruit, but it won't be the Spirit's fruit. It will be its opposite—lack of love, absence of joy, discord, impatience, unkindness and self-centeredness, deficiency of goodness, unfaithfulness, harshness, and little self-control.

After trying so long to produce an entire fruit orchard all at once and through sheer willpower, I finally realized I needed to let the Holy Spirit lead me. Since I didn't yet seem capable

of letting him lead me in all of them all at once, I decided to begin focusing on one fruit at a time.

I felt led to begin with *faithfulness* and firmly establish my commitment to stay the course. From there, I'd focus on *self-control* for, without that, my sinful nature prevails. The journey would take time; I'd need *patience*. With *faithfulness*, *self-control*, and *patience* improving, I'd become gentler. *Gentleness* would lead to greater *kindness*. With that solid foundation, I'd be better equipped to *love* consistently. *Goodness* would come more readily. From all these, *peace* would flow, and finally, abundant *joy*. I had my plan, and from it came my journey . . . and this book. I pray that what I experienced will help you with your struggles to match your actions to your intention to honor God with your life.

Making God Smile focuses on each fruit of God's Spirit for forty days so they establish deep, strong roots and become a permanent part of who we are. The number forty appears repeatedly in the Bible. It generally represents a time of testing, followed by renewal, restoration, or a momentous change.

- It rained for forty days and forty nights as God cleansed the earth and started afresh (Genesis 7:12). . . . *We can be cleansed of our sin and start afresh.*
- Twice Moses spent forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai communicating with God and receiving the Ten Commandments (Exodus 24:18; 34:28–29). When Moses completed those forty days and nights, his face was radiant. . . . *Our lives can be radiant with the joy of the Lord.*
- Moses sent men to explore God's Promised Land. After forty days they returned with some of its fruit!

(Numbers 13:1–27) . . . *We can carry the fruit of God's Spirit daily into our lives and the lives of others.*

- The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years before coming to the Promised Land (Exodus 16:35). . . . *We can experience the fulfillment of God's promises.*
- The Philistine giant Goliath taunted the Israelite army for forty days before being slain by David (1 Samuel 17:16). . . . *We can slay the giants that keep us from living as God intended.*
- Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights during his wilderness temptation by Satan, and he emerged victorious (Matthew 4:1–2). . . . *We can emerge victorious over Satan's attempts to keep us from a fruit-filled life.*

My journey has had its up and downs. I still fall short of who I want to be, but I'm closer. I still make mistakes, but fewer. I feel more calm, less buffeted by circumstance, and not as controlled by my emotions. I'm more patient, less reactive, and gentler. I choose kindness more often. I more freely express the love and joy that fill my heart. Most important, I know the Holy Spirit better. He's now my constant Companion and Friend.

For better or worse, my journey continues. Perhaps that is the point. If I had it all down pat, I might forget how much I need God. We all need him, every moment. When we're aware of this truth and choose to walk with him, we'll experience a peace, joy, richness, depth, and purpose to life that no one and nothing else can provide or take away. We will also know we're making God smile.

Thank you for joining me.

*As I stood there in silence—not even speaking of good things—
the turmoil within me grew worse.
The more I thought about it, the hotter I got,
igniting a fire of words.*

PSALM 39:2–3

Our dog Montana took a while to housebreak. He would relieve himself in the house whenever he had the urge—and also when his excitement rose above a minimum level. An emotional puppy, he'd get caught up in the moment and lose control. He'd pee on the rug.

Over time Montana learned that the consequences of doing so were not good. Eventually he learned to control himself and not let go where it was unacceptable to do so. What a relief when he was finally housebroken.

After all my years, my tongue still isn't completely housebroken. At times I still verbally pee on the rug, saying whatever I feel like saying, whenever and wherever I have the urge. I need to housebreak my tongue, to hold it when it's not appropriate or best to say what I'm feeling. That takes self-control. When I have the urge to speak what I ought not, perhaps I should go outside, away from others, and verbally relieve myself there.

As Montana learned, lack of control is not an endearing habit. I—and everyone around me—will be happier when I learn never to verbally pee on rugs. Getting word stains out is nearly impossible.

*Lord, whenever I see perfectly housebroken Montana,
let him remind me it's high time I housebroke my tongue.*

Turn my eyes away from worthless things.

PSALM 119:37 NIV84

I own a lighted magnifying mirror. When I look into its harsh light, I see every wrinkle, spot, and imperfection my face holds. The older I get, the more of these I see. I don't like that mirror: it doesn't give me gentle eyes.

While the magnifying mirror discourages and deflates me, when I catch a fleeting glimpse of myself in a mirror that's farther away, I feel I'm not doing too badly for my age. That's because I'm not studying myself. I'm seeing the overall picture, not the less attractive details. I'm looking at myself with gentle eyes.

When others see me, I pray they look with gentle eyes. I have a lot of—shall I gently say—imperfections, not only in my appearance, but also in my actions and words. If others look too closely, they'll see me in my worst light. But if they look at me with gentle eyes, they will, I hope, see some good.

I also need to have gentle eyes when I look at others. We are all a mixture of good and not-so-good. When we look at others closely, harshly, we focus on the not-so-good. But when we look with gentle eyes, we see the good. In photography that's called airbrushing: we remove imperfections so the beautiful is seen. We can do that with each other: use gentle eyes, give the benefit of the doubt, see only the good. If something is unpleasant, let it blur and fade next to the overall good. Airbrush it away. Let the best be all we see (Philippians 4:8).

Lord, help me always look with gentle eyes.

*In all these things we are more than conquerors
through him who loved us.*

ROMANS 8:37 NIV84

Feelings can overtake us. We can clench our fists, grit our teeth, scrunch our eyes, and try with all our might to get rid of them, but we can't will them away. When we want to act with love but our feelings are yelling, "No! I don't want to!" we may not be able to stop their uproar, but we can ignore it, and act with love by:

- *Turning to God:* Our emotions are powerful. God is more powerful. "Watch out for attacks from Satan. . . . Stand firm. . . . Trust the LORD" (1 Peter 5:8–9 TLB).
- *Refocusing our thoughts:* Our thoughts impact our emotions. Choose to "fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right" (Philippians 4:8 TLB).
- *Choosing self-control:* We don't have to act how we feel. That's what this fruit is for. "In your anger do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26 NIV84).

Acting with love when we don't feel love is like swimming upstream. It can be done, but it takes strength and endurance. When we don't have enough of our own, we can ask God for what we need. The more we practice swimming against the current of our emotions, the stronger we become, and the easier it will be the next time our emotions surge.

Lord, help me conquer my feelings with love.

*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

My fruit production was on the upswing. I was learning to hold my tongue, respond instead of react, keep silent when annoyed, let go of the unimportant, and turn the important over to God. But then my husband got grouchy. People I care about were facing stressful situations. I felt tired and unappreciated. My husband said something that offended me. I'm not trying to make excuses. It's just that the perfect storm hit. Words I later regretted flowed from my mouth.

I wanted to produce a fruit orchard for God, but my words had just wiped out a few trees. "I said, 'I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth.' . . . [But] my heart grew hot within me. . . . Then I spoke" (Psalm 39:1, 3 NIV84).

I felt terrible. I'd let God down. In his goodness he reminded me there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ" (Romans 8:1), that "only God is truly good" (Mark 10:18), and that "not a single person on earth is always good and never sins" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). That's why we have a Savior.

After taking a wrong turn off the road to goodness, "stop at the crossroads and look around. Ask for the old, godly way, and walk in it. . . . You will find rest for your souls" (Jeremiah 6:16).

Thank you, God, for giving me sunshine after my storm.

May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father.

COLOSSIANS 1:11-12

In my predawn quiet time, nestled in my comfy chair, the only light the moon and flickering flames in my fireplace, I snuggled under blankets and hugged my coffee mug. My two dogs snoozed. Outside, bare cottonwood branches were silhouetted against a steel-gray sky.

I usually start these special times with prayer. But that day I felt like just sitting in soundless, wordless worship. In the quiet, I surrendered all I am to the Creator of all things. I felt peaceful, wrapped in God's presence. I felt consuming love from him and for him, and intense gratitude for all he is and all he's done. I felt comforting trust, secure in his wisdom and plan. I felt . . . joy.

I've sometimes felt guilty for not continuously singing, skipping, dancing, or laughing out loud with delight. If I'm not wearing a perpetual grin, perhaps I'm not showing sufficient appreciation for my blessings. After all, isn't such an overflowing what joy means?

Sometimes it does. But as I sat silent and still that morning, I understood that joy doesn't have to be rollicking. Joy is profound. It's soul-touching awareness of God's grace, goodness, and love. It's peace coursing through our veins. It's being awed by God's magnificence.

It's wonderful when joy erupts into smiles, laughter, dancing, and song. But it's glorious when joy simply permeates our being, reassuring us that all is well . . . all is well.

*Thank you, Lord, for allowing me to experience
your incomparable joy.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kim Henry has been studying the Bible for more than twenty-five years and for two years taught a private Bible study on the fruit of the Spirit. She has also served as a Stephen Minister.

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She spent seventeen years as a corporate defense litigation attorney and eight years as vice-president of human resources for two major corporations, where her work involved extensive writing and speaking. Kim has an analytical mind tempered by humor and empathy, fired by a deep love for the Lord. She has a passion for self-improvement, a dogged determination, and a heart that seeks to understand.

Kim has three grown children and five grandchildren and lives with her husband in Colorado. She loves to spend time with family and friends, hike, take walks, work out, and lead a healthy lifestyle. Her travels to over seventy countries in the last several years have broadened her perspective and deepened her insight.

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