



GOLDEN  
FRUIT



# GOLDEN FRUIT

Nine Lessons about the Fruit of the Spirit

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CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE • SAINT LOUIS

JULIE HALE MASCHHOFF  
A Women's Small-Group Bible Study





This Bible study is dedicated to the wonderful women in my small groups. You are each a true blessing in my life. May God continue to bless each of you as we journey through our “golden years.”

—Julie Hale Maschhoff



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3558 S. Jefferson Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63118-3968  
1-800-325-3040 · www.cph.org

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## **SUGGESTIONS FOR SMALL-GROUP PARTICIPANTS**

1. Begin small-group time with prayer.
2. Every participant should feel free to express her thoughts. Comments shared in the small group should remain confidential unless you have received permission to share them outside your group.
3. If your meeting time does not allow you to discuss all of the questions for the week, the leader should choose the questions most meaningful to the group.
4. Close by sharing concerns and prayer requests, then praying together.

## As We Begin Our Journey . . .

This Bible study was written with you in mind. Yes, you. If you are a woman (hello, sister!) and a Christian (and even if you are not), I hope you will find God's message in this study, and I look forward to this journey with you. As women in this time of history, we have a big job. We are to be good wives, devoted daughters, loving sisters, supermoms, and cool grandmas. Of course, we must always set the tone for our household—have you heard the saying, “If Mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy”? If you don't have children, you are to be the fun aunt and the dutiful daughter with lots of time to deal with aging parents. We, as women, are to be emotional, intuitive, creative, hardworking, and supportive of everyone around us. And oh, yes, we should always be healthy and look our best. Are you tired just reading that? I am. I know what a big job we all have. I know we become tired and crabby and just want some time to get away or be alone. I know that as we age, life piles things on: things that sometimes make us sad or scared or downright angry. These burdens weigh us down and threaten to rob our lives of fruitfulness.

However, I also know that God promises us salvation and peace in exchange for our burdens. That is the hard part, isn't it? How can we dare feel free to give Him our burdens, to trust Him with the fruit of our lives, when we are supposed to be in charge of so many things? Well, sister, let's try to figure that out together. As we do, my prayer is that the fruit of the Spirit will bring many blessings to us all.

### The Author

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

(Galatians 5:22–23)



## THE VINE

I am the true vine, and My Father  
is the vinedresser. (John 15:1)

**Group Prayer:** Father, help us and guide us as we begin this journey of studying the fruit of the Spirit. By Your Spirit, may we all grow in understanding and courage to live out this fruit fully in each stage of our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Acres and acres of grapevines stretch out across gently rolling hills: the beauty of brilliant red, deep purple, or bright green grapes summon up the promise of succulent tastes to come. From popping a ripe, fresh grape into one's mouth to a glass of delicate white wine, grapes provide us with innumerable flavors and tastes. Grapes are the largest fruit crop on earth and are definitely one of God's glorious creations.

Growing grapes is a tedious and very time-consuming endeavor. The grape on the vine is only as good as the vine itself. For delicious grapes, the vine must be treated with a lot of tender loving care. Cindy Newkirk of Steinbeck Vineyard in Paso Robles, California, states that a year of preparation goes into each vine alone. After each growing season, the vines are "put to bed" with heavy irrigation and fertilization.

During the winter months, the vines' branches are pruned to ensure better quality fruit, and in March, the buds swell and shoots begin to sprout. During the growing season, the grapes begin to sweeten as sugar is transported from the leaves to the fruit. The sweet fruit of the vine will not successfully grow if the vine is not meticulously tended by the vine-grower. Let's study the wonderful women of the Bible and see how God produced the fruits of faith in them!



WEEK 1:

THE LOVE  
OF RUTH

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13

**Group Prayer:** Father, help us understand how Christians should love others. Keep us strong as we strive to love those who are difficult to love. Fill us with the love of Christ that we may love others as You have loved us. Amen.

When you hear the word *love*, what comes to mind? Perhaps a favorite song drifts into your consciousness from somewhere in the past. From “Some Enchanted Evening” from the movie *South Pacific* to Elvis’s “Love Me Tender,” songwriters and singers have expressed their own ideas of love down through history. Poets such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Lord Byron have expressed their feelings of love in beautifully written language. That’s not to mention the depiction of love in movies, books, and television shows. Our understanding of love is often influenced by our entertainment.

Perhaps the word *love* brings to mind other family members: children, parents, sisters or brothers, and grandchildren, or showing love through the giving of cards and gifts on holidays such as Valentine’s Day, Mother’s Day, or Father’s Day.

Maybe you are an animal lover and love your pet. Do you love chocolate or popcorn or candy bars? We can love almost anything, can't we?

Researchers have identified six types of love:

- *Eros* involves romance and passion.
- *Ludus* is uncommitted love.
- *Storge* refers to a slow-developing, friendship-based love.
- *Pragma* love is a practical, mutually beneficial relationship.
- *Mania* is an obsessive, jealous love.
- *Agape* is a gentle, giving, unconditional type of love.

God speaks to us clearly about how we are to love one another. Depending on the translation, the word *love* is mentioned as many as 508 times in the Bible—more if the word *loved* is counted. Discuss the following verses and identify how the word *love* is used in each verse.

**Leviticus 19:18:** You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

1. Besides commanding us not to seek revenge or bear a grudge, why did God tell us to love our neighbors?

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**Proverbs 10:12:** Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.

2. How can love cover an offense?

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**1 Peter 4:8:** Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

3. According to this verse, does love make sin go away?

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**Romans 12:10:** Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

4. How does God expect us to act toward one another?

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**Ephesians 5:25:** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

5. How does God instruct husbands to treat their wives?

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**John 3:16:** For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

6. How does it make you feel to realize that God gave His only Son to save us?

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### The Fruit of Ruth

Then [Naomi] arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited His people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were

grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me.” Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

And she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

(Ruth 1:6–18)

7. What is the setting for the Book of Ruth?

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8. Naomi was left without her husband and two sons. How does she say she feels (v. 13)?

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9. How did Ruth and Orpah exhibit love for their mother-in-law?

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10. What did Ruth say when she stayed with Naomi? Is that love?

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11. What can we learn from this story?

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**Let's Talk about Love**

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12. Discussion starter: In your own words, describe love.

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13. Do you remember your first love? Describe it here:

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14. How was that love different from love you experienced later in life?

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15. How has God helped you love your family throughout your life?

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a. Love for parents

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b. Love for spouse

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c. Love for in-laws

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d. Love for children and grandchildren

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16. Do you find anyone in particular hard to love? Why?

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17. Describe love, as you view it, in this season of your life.

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### **God's Promise**

God promises us in His Word that He loves us with an everlasting love. He binds His love to us in our Baptism, and so He will not leave us or forsake us, even when we do not listen to Him or when we turn away from Him. God loves us so much that He gave His only Son to die for us, so that we will live in eternity with Him. Isn't it absolutely incredible that

God could love us so much that He sacrificed His only Son for us? Today, God continues to love us, speaking words of forgiveness in Absolution and assuring us of His continuing love in Holy Communion. Could we ask for more? I don't think so. His love for us is an everlasting love, and that love now dwells within us. His love for us empowers us to love others truly. Ask God to help you do just that.

**Challenge of the Week:** Identify someone you (or society) feel is unlovable. Reach out to that person in Christian love.



**Closing Prayer:** Father, we thank You for the love You have shown us by giving Your only Son to die for our sins. We realize we do not love You or others as we should. Forgive us, Lord, according to Your great love, and walk with us each and every day, helping us to grow in love for all. Amen.



# LEADER'S GUIDE

## Week 1: The Love of Ruth

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1. We are to show love for others because hatred is destructive to ourselves and to others. God Himself seeks vengeance.
2. Answers will vary.
3. It is not our love alone that covers sins, it is by the love of Christ Jesus that sins are forgiven. Christ covers all sins by His blood poured out for us on the cross.
4. This verse tells us that we are to show to all people the kind of expansive, generous love that we show our own family members. After all, in Baptism, we are made to be brothers and sisters!
5. Christ's love for the church was sacrificial and complete. He gave Himself fully for His Church. Husbands and wives are to follow His example of selflessness.
6. Answers will vary.
7. Ruth is set in Moab, a foreign land for her. There has been a drought and a famine, increasing the hardship that widows must endure.
8. In this historical time period, women without husbands or sons had no secure means of support. She probably felt very alone and destitute.
9. They loved and respected her so much that they wanted to stay with her. Even though Naomi told both of the women to return to their own homes, Ruth asked to stay with Naomi because she was so devoted to her.
10. Ruth pledges her commitment from this moment until her death to Naomi and to her "people," who are the children of Israel. This exhibits familial love, but more than that, it shows the depth of her love for the Lord.

11. Answers will vary, but should include that God has commanded us to love one another. The love for family can bring many blessings.

12–17. Answers will vary.