

LIVING
BY THE
FRUIT OF THE
SPIRIT

ALSO BY DON AYCOCK

*Eight Days That Changed the World:
A Devotional Study from Palm Sunday to Easter*

*God's Man: A Daily Devotional to
Christlike Character* (gen. ed.)

*The Little Handbook to Perfecting the Art of Christian Writing:
Getting Your Foot in the Publisher's Door*, with Leonard G. Goss

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Christlike Character*, with Mark Sutton

The Word Is Near You: Sermons for the Church

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EXPANDED EDITION



LIVING
BY THE
FRUIT OF THE
SPIRIT

Don M. Aycocock

 Kregel
Publications

Living by the Fruit of the Spirit

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ISBN 978-0-8254-4418-0

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 / 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16

To our sons, Dr. Chris Aycock and Dr. Ryan Aycock;
and to Ryan's wife, Jennifer, and their son, Jacob.
We're so proud of you all.

And to our spiritual family, Liberty Baptist Church
of Palatka, Florida. The fruit of the Spirit, especially
love, characterizes our relationship.

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Foreword

FRUIT IN OUR LIVES is essential. When a life shows no fruit, it is unprofitable. Others usually value us according to the fruit our lives produce, good or bad. The degree that we move forward in life as believers generally is determined by the fruit we display.

If the employer can't find productivity in the employee's workmanship, that employee will soon be out of a job. If a schoolteacher can't find the evidence of learning in the student, that student will not receive a pass to the next grade. We even choose our friends based on the bounty we see in their lives.

Nonbelievers will judge whether we are truly Christian by the fruit they observe. It comes down to the simple fact that the godly success we achieve in life is based on the fruit we evidence during our lifetime.

Since the display of fruit is so important, I am pleased that my friend wrote a book on the subject. He doesn't just focus on the need to show fruit that qualifies us as good employees or worthy students; no, he goes further and discusses how fruit will identify where we will spend eternity, which I regard as the most important fruit of all.

It is appropriate that Dr. Don Aycock authored this important book because, having known him as a friend for many years, I have no problem identifying the good fruit in his life.

I recommend that the reader review this book regularly. It would serve well as the basis for an annual personal checkup.

Reg A. Forder, Founder/President
American Christian Writers

Introduction

WHEN I WAS ABOUT ten years old, I went to the fair in a town close to where I lived. The variety of stomach-murdering food was pure joy to a little boy who loved junk food. The booths with balloons for bursting and the stalls with BB guns for shooting out a star on a piece of cardboard were wonderful lures to make little boys spend their hard-earned quarters. But the most memorable attraction was the fun house. The fun house had walls of glass so you were not sure if you could go straight, and mirrors in one room that made you look at least seven feet tall. But the thing I remember most was the entrance. To get into the fun house, you had to walk across a bridge-like structure that swayed up and down and back and forth. If you could just get in, you would do fine.

In the years since my first trip to that fun house, I have thought often of the moving floor at the entrance. It seems almost like a parable about life. We try to do the best we can, but the very foundations under our feet seem to buckle and sway to throw us off balance. We might do well if it were not for the moving paths we travel. Our world has much that is good and beautiful, but it also has much that is ugly and harmful. At times the world itself seems very crooked. This presents a dilemma for Christians: How can we walk straight when most paths seem crooked?

The apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians to help them learn what freedom in Christ is and appropriate that freedom as the anchoring force in their lives. In 5:22–25, Paul listed the fruit of the Spirit and urged his readers to live by the Spirit. He wrote: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature, its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

These elements of the fruit of the Spirit are precisely the steadying and energizing forces that help Christians walk and live in the present world. They have to do with our inner lives of faith and devotion, with our relationships with others around us, and with our love for the heavenly Father. As such, these matters represent some of the most basic of Christian ethics, values, and virtues. The elements grow inwardly and are expressed outwardly. Eugene Peterson has written, “God does not impose his reality from without; he grows flowers and fruit from within. God’s truth is not an alien invasion but a loving courtship.”¹

Paul did not use the plural—fruits—here, but instead used the singular—fruit. I think he used the singular because he was not referring to many paths of the Spirit. He was giving a holistic view of spiritual life. A sound spiritual life will contain not some but all of these elements to some degree. It is like a hub with many spokes or a tree with many branches. The goal is to seek the fruit of the Spirit as a unified whole instead of as a fragmented, piecemeal vision.

A man appeared on the streets of Chicago a few years ago wearing a sandwich-board displaying these words: “Bad news! Bad news! The world isn’t coming to an end. You’re going to have to cope!” Those who live out of the power and values of the fruit of the Spirit can cope all right, but they will do more than that. After all, in Christ we are “more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37). These basic aspects of faith help us to take whatever comes our way and transform it all for our betterment and the glory of God. One man expressed this hope in one of his prayers:

Teach me, O God, so to use all the circumstances of my life today that they may bring forth in me the fruits of holiness rather than the fruits of sin.

Let me use disappointment as material for patience.

Let me use success as material for thankfulness.

Let me use trouble as material for perseverance.

Let me use danger as material for courage.

Let me use reproach as material for long suffering.

Let me use praise as material for humility.

Let me use pleasures as material for temperance.
Let me use pain as material for endurance.²

I have devoted one chapter to each of the elements that Paul mentions in Galatians 5:22 and have added an epilogue on walking in the Spirit.

The first chapter is on love. I have written about it intimately and personally because I think love cannot be explained adequately in the abstract. If you are helped through these efforts to live by the fruit of the Spirit, then my goal in writing this book will have been satisfied.

*When God measures man, He puts the tape
around his heart—not his head.*

GUIDEPOSTS



CHAPTER 1

It Makes the World Go Round

L O V E

Learning About Love—A Personal Story

MY OLD '65 CHEVY PICKUP lunged forward as I headed home for the weekend. I was beginning my second year of college, and my time at school had been very difficult. I had come from a rural community and arrived on a campus with thousands of students. It was 1969, and the '60s atmosphere of wildness, rebellion, and general suspicion of everyone over twenty-one hung like a shroud over the large university campus. A shy kid from the "sticks" had a tough time ever feeling at home in a place like that. But others had done it, and, with all my seventeen years of enthusiasm still intact, I could see no reason why I could not make it too.

The first year had come and gone, and I was entering my second year when the crisis hit me like a hurricane. The crisis, which was like what almost everyone else I knew was going through, was the question that haunted me like a ghost: Who am I, and does anyone care if I live or die? Many of my friends were going to Vietnam, and some of them were not returning. Others were heavily into drugs and, from the way they acted, might as well have been in Southeast Asia.

I was fortunate. The draft had not summoned me. Taking drugs had never interested me in the least. I attended a local church and even taught a youth Sunday school class. But all of that could not help quiet the question in my mind. It seemed like a dog growling in the basement. That angry, hurting, threatening question kept surfacing, and nothing could appease its ravenous appetite for long.

I dished out hors d'oeuvres of logic. "You know who you are. You are the son of Dewey and Mabel Aycock. You were born in Texas and lived most of your life in Evangeline, Louisiana. You worked on a rice farm and as a roughneck in the oil fields to go to school. You love music and the things of God." But these little appetizers did not last long. The dog in the basement kept growling its question: "Yes, but who are you, and does anyone really care?"

I also tossed out scraps of desperation. "Don't you know that everybody is feeling like this? Don't you realize that nobody feels perfectly right all the time?" But these scraps did not last long and were soon digested by that beast in the basement who never let up in its quest for an answer to its haunting question: "Who are you, and does anyone care?"

I was not taken by surprise, then, when the crisis came. It was no thief in the night, slipping silently into my dormitory room to carry away my few precious belongings. It came instead as a masterful landlord who pounded on the door to demand immediate and respectful admittance. I knew that sooner or later I had to answer that knock, but I would have liked to put it off as long as possible.

When I headed my old Chevy pickup home for that weekend, it was for no sock washing. It was for a reunion with a part of me that had been left behind. I do not know how my truck stayed on the road. I cried all the way home with an incredible realization of the answer to my question: "Who am I?" The answer came this way: "I am my parents' son. I am growing and maturing and realizing the answer to the second question—'Does anyone care?' The answer is an undeniable, unswerving, absolute 'Yes!' Someone does care. I am loved." I was not going crazy that afternoon. I was going sane.

This answer had always been part of me. I had always known it, but

there are times, such as going off to college or work, when a person needs to feel loved. Sometimes the distance between the head and the heart is more than a matter of eighteen inches. It is sometimes measured by the yardstick of years of struggle and pain and doubt and by the ruler of regret.

Driving home that fall afternoon gave me a chance to reflect on my life. Various images displayed themselves on the screen of my memory, and I watched the show with amazement. I was no casual observer but rather the cast, the director, and the stagehand.

I saw a little boy of seven or eight come walking into the living room with his BB gun slung over his shoulder. As he passed in front of the old Zenith black and white TV, the BB gun went off and shot out the picture tube. Panic and fear seized him, and he was sure his parents would too. Instead, they sized up the situation and peered into the face of a terrified little soldier whose world seemed to have shattered along with the picture tube. A loving mother and father decided then and there that their little boy was worth far more than an old Zenith. They assured him that it was not his fault and that the BB had not even come close to the TV. It just “happened” to explode about the same time as the boy passed in front of it. To a terrified seven- or eight-year-old kid, such an explanation seems perfectly logical, and he happily accepted it as the true account of the death of the TV. Only later did he figure out what really had happened and why his parents “stretched” the facts a bit. That feature presentation played in my memory that fall afternoon and went into reruns many times later. “I am loved.”

The second feature came on. It showed that same boy, now a bit older—about ten or twelve. He was in a Texas oil field where his father was a toolpusher (the foreman on a drilling rig). A truck from a chemical supply company came lumbering down the board road on its way to the drilling site. The driver turned around and began backing up to the supply house. He could not see everything clearly and backed his truck into the radiator of one of the large diesel engines used to pump the drilling fluids. The truck driver stopped when he felt the bump and jumped out to see what had happened. He saw the boy standing there watching the accident. The toolpusher came running over.

Before he could say a word, the truck driver said, “That kid over there was in my way. I didn’t want to run over him, so I had to swing around him. That’s why I hit the pump. It’s his fault.”

The boy was stunned. But before he could think to speak, he saw his father get red in the face and get right up into the face of the driver. He yelled over the roar of the rig noise, “I saw exactly what happened. He was standing over here way out of your way. He didn’t have anything to do with it. You’re just a bad driver who just tore up my radiator. It’s your fault and your company is going to pay for getting it fixed. Got it?”

The driver just nodded, pulled his truck out of the pierced radiator, and unloaded his supplies. Later, the toolpusher took the radiator to a shop to have it fixed, and the boy went along. He told his son, “I know that wasn’t your fault, so don’t worry about it. And if anyone ever tries to blame you for something like that again, you come tell me. We’ll get it straight in a hurry.”

Parents sometimes overprotect their children and never let them live up to the consequences of their own actions. Others always assume the worst about their kids, blaming everything on them, even if it was not their fault. My parents knew the difference, and that day in a Texas oil field many years ago is riveted to my memory. “I am loved.”

Other little films played themselves for me that afternoon as I headed home. Vignettes long packed away in storage bubbled to the surface as if on their own. I saw a father standing behind his son, with his arms draped over the boy’s shoulders and making a “V” across his chest. He proudly told his associates at work, “This is my son.” Both the boy and the man beamed. I reviewed the scene of parents presenting their son a brand new Bundy trumpet in the eighth grade because he wanted to be a musician. New trumpets cost a lot of money, money that came hard. But they cared about what their son cared about. I watched the rerun of a father giving his little boy a guitar and always requesting in later years, “Hey, get your guitar and play us a tune.”

Many other images came. The boy and his brother and father made a wooden boat to fish in Bayou Des Canes and spent many joyous hours hauling in bluecats off a trot line. I saw the boy out in a garden working side by side with his father. He hated planting a garden, but he

liked working with the older man. Is it any wonder that the replaying of those memories, along with many others, had a healing effect on me as I struggled to ask the perennial teenage question?

But there are memories of a totally different kind too. I look back on times when my father worked away from home, and I missed him and longed to talk to him. But all of these scenes have little power to affect me now because the ones in which I felt loved, appreciated, and accepted dominate my mental and emotional landscape.

Truly, love is a healer of all manner of human hurts. Even medical research is discovering this truth. In his book *Love & Survival: The Scientific Basis for the Healing Power of Intimacy*, Dr. Dean Ornish wrote, “Love and intimacy are at the root of what makes us sick and what makes us well, what causes sadness and what brings happiness, what makes us suffer and what leads to healing. If a new drug had the same impact, virtually every doctor in the country would be recommending it for their patients. It would be malpractice not to prescribe it.”¹

This wise physician realizes that love, or the lack of it, affects us in positive or negative ways, but it is never neutral. For people who have read the Bible, that news comes as no surprise. Why? Because, as 1 John 4:16 puts it, “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” Let us explore this idea further.

Love and God

A theologian wrote, “To love always implies personal investment in the object of love; where there is no evidence of such personal caring, one may question whether love exists for the object.”²

Personal investment. That is a good phrase. That was God’s choice in dealing with mankind in love. That is what the cross is. Many people know that the original language of the New Testament is Greek. In that language, three words are primarily used for love:

1. *philia*: love for one’s fellow human being—care, respect, compassion;
2. *agape*: our love for God, a reverence for the divine being of God; and

3. *eros*: affectionate, tender hungering for union with the loved one; passionate desire for a fulfilling relationship.

Which of these terms best describes God's love? The normal answer is the second word—*agape*. But the truth is that God's love is all three terms—and more.

When Paul referred to the fruit of the Spirit as love, I feel sure that he had many things in mind. He meant primarily that astounding love that God has for His children. To speak of the love of God is like speaking of the universe. I cannot even imagine it, so I will have to do what scientists do with the universe—break it down into smaller parts. They speak of galaxies, such as the Milky Way; of individual planets, such as the Earth; of specific countries, such as the United States; of unique states, such as Tennessee; of definite places, such as Memphis; and of specific individuals, such as me.

First John 4:7–21 is one of the most amazing passages in the entire Bible. It begins and ends with the affirmation that love is from God from first to last. “God is love.” This is a far cry from the “unmoved mover” or “that, than which nothing greater can be conceived” of the philosophers. Because God is love, I am. I exist through the goodness of His letting there be life. He spoke the eternal word, “Let there be light” and there was light. Similarly, God said, “Let there be Don,” and there was Don! God expresses His love through His letting be. He lets people and plants and an entire universe be. This letting be calls persons into existence and leads them on to reach the full potential of their lives. God confers Himself in the lives of those who welcome Him. He sustains life and perfects its creative possibilities. We are because God lets us be, and He lets us be because He is love.

This gives us a clue to the meaning of life and the Christian faith. God, who created all things and creatures, did not find supreme pleasure in them until He created people, who, like God, can love and be loved. It is thus while I love and allow myself to be loved that I am most like God. Piety does not mean that I “play God.” It means that I allow myself to live in the relationship for which God most completely fit me, namely, love.

In his classic book on biblical love, *The Greatest Thing in the World*, Henry Drummond looked at 1 Corinthians 13 as the passage that best describes and defines love. Drummond said that God-given love as there described has nine ingredients, which he charted as follows:

Patience	“Love is patient.”
Kindness	“Love is kind.”
Generosity	“It does not envy.”
Humility	“It does not boast, it is not proud.”
Courtesy	“It is not rude.”
Unselfishness	“It is not self-seeking.”
Good Temper	“It is not easily angered.”
Guilelessness	“It keeps no record of wrongs.”
Sincerity	“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.”

In a new edition of Henry Drummond’s book, Lewis Drummond noted the similarities between the qualities of love in 1 Corinthians 13 and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23.³

1 Corinthians 13	Galatians 5:22–23
Patience	Patience
Kindness	Kindness
Not jealous	Joy
Not arrogant	Gentleness
Not counting evil	Self-control
Not provoked	Peace
Holy	Goodness
Selfless	
Enduring	Faithfulness
Humble	

The fruit of the Spirit grows out of love.

Francis de Sales (1567–1622) wrote a devotional guide titled *Introduction to the Devout Life* in which he reflected on the love of God

and the need of people to love Him. He thought that God wants the love of people as expressed through their devotion to him. He wrote: "True devotion . . . presupposes not a partial but a thorough love of God. For inasmuch as divine love adorns the soul, it is called grace, making us pleasing to the Divine Majesty; inasmuch as it gives us the strength to do good, it is called charity; but when it is arrived at that degree of perfection by which it not only makes us do well but also work diligently, frequently, and readily, then it is called devotion."⁴

God's love can be conceived in an abstract, detached way, but I really think that de Sales was right in thinking about it in personal and intimate terms.

I wrote at the beginning of this chapter about a spiritual crisis that changed my life. God, in His love, uses such crises to communicate His care. That is what Easter Sunday is. That is what any crisis of separation is, whether it be death, a divorce, a child leaving home, or some other event. During those times when we have to look our solitude squarely in the face, we find that the face is friendly. God is there because God is love.

First John 4:18 says, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear." God frees me to love myself, knowing full well that I am far from perfect but still okay. He frees me to love my family, even though my love is not fully mature and they do not fully respond to me. God frees me to love my friends, even though they sometimes disappoint me and I betray their trust. God, in Christ, comes to me with an offer of eternal love. I can refuse only at my own peril. "But perfect love drives out fear." So I am open to God's love as I am open to a friend or my beloved wife and children. It is here that I find myself "at home" in His presence, accepted as His child, and protected as His precious creation.

Love and Marriage

Growth, change, and healing come not only from parental and divine love but also married love. Many a person who has felt unloved in youth has learned to be loved and to feel loved later in life by losing himself or herself in the life of another. Jesus was right when He said, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it" (Matt. 16:25). This

means to enter so deeply into the life of another that I am no longer the center of my universe. This happens spiritually in Christ. It also happens emotionally in marriage.

Some people are heralding the death of marriage, but such proclamation is greatly exaggerated. Men and women will always learn to care for each other. The survival of humanity depends on it, although procreation is by no means the primary reason for marriage.

My discovery of the wonder and mystery of losing myself in the life of someone else came, like many of life's good things, unexpectedly. My wife and I met in an unusual way but chose each other. Carla and I have celebrated our silver anniversary of married life. We are parents of twins, Ryan and Christopher, and grandparents to Jacob. How can I refer to any of that as planned, logical, or ordinary? Yet, in its own way, this is exactly what it is. Our story is unique in its details, but many, many people have had similar experiences of love. People who at first did not even like each other later ended up "hitched." In the case of a couple who are friends of ours, the man was the woman's high school teacher. Later they married and are today one of the strongest families I know. Another couple began their relationship with the man being the woman's supervisor in a hospital laboratory.

I have experienced nearly indescribable support in my marriage. God did not make a mistake when He set lonely people in families. Psalm 68:6 puts it this way: "God sets the lonely in families." When Adam first saw Eve, he exclaimed, "At last!" (see Gen. 2:23–24). He knew a good thing when he saw it.

But there is great confusion today about what love is. I recently did an Internet search using the word love and came up with more than twenty-two thousand references! The very first one was pornographic, and the rest were widely diverse. Some of the topics that came up under love included romantic poetry, tourism slogans (e.g., "I Love New York"), pictures purporting to display love, an essay on love and hate in the work of Tennessee Williams, love songs, adoption services, places that sell "love potions," pen pal services, dating services, on-line love tips, and some guy in Canada who writes that he is God and created the world.

Love, as Paul put it in Galatians 5:22, is a fruit of the Spirit. This does not mean that it is some abstract, bloodless, lifeless principle. The love between a man and a woman in marriage is as much the work of God as is the love of God for mankind. Both are theologically oriented. A church is the proper place for weddings if at all possible. The building and the surroundings say symbolically, “There is a third party involved in this union. He is the same One who said, ‘Let there be light’ and ‘Let there be love.’” And behold, there is both!

The importance of love in marriage is demonstrated by the following situation. Joseph Stalin was the leader of the Russian communist revolution after the death of Lenin. He was married to a woman named Catherine Svanidze. Stalin seems to have loved her deeply. When she died at an early age in 1907, Stalin pointed to her coffin and said, “She was the one creature who softened my heart of stone. She is dead, and with her have died my last warm feelings for humanity.” He pointed to his heart and said, “It is all so desolate here, so inexpressibly empty.”⁵ Stalin went on to rule one of the most repressive, bloodthirsty regimes ever known. He is responsible for the deaths of an estimated twenty million of his own people! I have to wonder what would have happened had his wife lived so that her love might have continued to soften Stalin.

Love and Friendship

We cannot think of love without thinking of friendship. These two concepts are closely related. But when was the last time you read something about friendship? You can find mountains of books on love, but the pickings for friendship are pretty slim. Even when someone tries to do something with it, misunderstandings crop up, especially with friendships among men.

When Stuart Miller began research for his book *Men and Friendship*, most people thought he was working on a book about homosexuality.⁶ But Miller was asking the question many men raise: “Why don’t I have many close friends?” After spending years searching for answers, he concluded that genuine friendship is hard to find.

“True friendship,” he wrote, “must also be true engagement with the friend—a very frequent mutual holding in the mind and heart. Though

the centrifugal pressures of modern life limit the frequency of the physical presence of friends, engagement makes physical proximity less of a problem. Male friendship can thus be thought of as a place in a man's inner being, a space in his life, that is daily occupied by another man, a place that is regularly charged with love, concern, hurt. Engagement means emotional involvement."⁷

The rise of groups such as Promise Keepers is, in part, the result of men wanting more out of life and relationships than just golfing buddies. They want close relationships with other men. They want love and friendship.⁸ In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine wrote, "Men go forth to wonder at the heights of mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad flow of the rivers, the vast compass of the ocean, the courses of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering."⁹

To wonder means to accept ourselves and our full capacity to love others and to express that love. That is often difficult to do. We fear that we might appear weak or foolish to others if we open ourselves to love. But what other option is there? To remain suspicious and nonloving?

Evelyn and James Whitehead have written of our need to learn to express love in friendships and other ways. They write, "The Christian injunction to love one another, for example, is complemented by learning how to express and engender this love. Loving entails more than good feelings or proper attitudes; it involves certain behaviors—sharing of myself, empathy with others, confrontation. . . . To share myself with another, I must be psychologically disposed, able to overcome the hesitancy suggested by fear or suspicion or shame. But, these overcome, I must be able actually to share—to disclose myself in a way that is appropriate for me and for the situation."¹⁰

When I was growing up, I had many friends but one special one. His name is Milton. He and I were almost inseparable. We lived a half mile apart in a rural area of south Louisiana. There were woods, swamps, a bayou, and pastures for cattle around us, and we knew every square inch of them. Together, Milton and I hunted, fished, went to school, played basketball at school and softball at home, and threw cow "muffins" at each other. We once lined up tin cans on the little road in front of our houses so cars would have to slow down when they got there.

We waited in the palmetto bushes and shot out their tail lights with BB guns. (I've regretted this many times since!) We swung from vines out over Bayou Des Canes, giving our Tarzan yells as we let go and hit the water. We climbed small pines, grabbed the tops of these saplings, and jumped out so the trees bent and we got an "elevator" ride down. Sometimes the tops snapped off, and our ride down was faster than we wanted! Milton and I picked mayhaws in the swamps and rode around in boats during flood times. He had a huge abandoned sawdust pile behind his house, and we spent many hours tunneling through the sawdust with old stockings over our heads to keep the sawdust out of our eyes and noses. We were friends, and friends will do anything with—or for—friends.

Milton and I do not see each other very often now. We have gone our separate ways as adults do, although I still hold him in high esteem. There is something about that relationship that taught me some important things about friendship.

Friends have time for each other. This sounds like an obvious truism, but think about it for a minute. If you are "average" (whatever that means), you probably would like to have more friends, especially those who are willing to spend time with you. I am not referring here to a next-door neighbor who drops in unexpectedly to take up your precious time with idle chatter over coffee. Instead, I am thinking of a close friend who enjoys the same kinds of things you do, whether it be spending the afternoon in front of the TV watching a football game, going shopping (my wife's favorite hobby!), snagging a few bass out of your favorite honey hole, or traveling to some unusual destination for a day's enjoyment.

I have a friend named Bill who was in seminary with me. He and I shared a common interest—goose hunting. We spent many hours together nearly freezing to death in a goose blind on the Ballard County Wildlife Refuge in LaCenter, Kentucky. I am not sure about Bill, but I went hunting not so much for the meat as for the fun and diversion. We would tell every joke we knew and laugh more than I can tell. Somehow stories seem funnier when you are in a pit below ground in twelve-degree temperatures with sleet and snow falling. To this day,

I do not know how we ever got any geese. Surely they could hear us a half mile away, but we almost always went back home with game. I have not gone goose hunting in a long time, and I miss those times of hilarity in a goose pit.

Friends make time for each other, not only for the fun times but also for the tragic times. I will never forget when a close friend showed up at my office. He looked haggard, and when I asked what was wrong, he explained that his wife was in the hospital because of a suicide attempt. Nothing in the world could have gotten me away from him that afternoon. There have been times, too, when I really needed to talk to a friend. I am glad for people who make time for me, and I try to do this in my work. Pastoral care is intensified friendship carried on by a man or a woman willing to listen—really listen—and then offer insights and support.

Friendship comes through people being open with each other because without openness, close relations cannot develop. If I go about my life as if I were somehow totally self-sufficient, and therefore closed off to others, then I would have no friends. When I display an attitude of openness with everything in my life, from words to deeds, I then invite others to get to know me. Friendship wears a welcome mat on its face. The strange thing about it is that if a person intentionally tries to make friends, he sometimes succeeds in driving people away instead of bringing them close. We cannot make someone like us. We can only be available to allow a friendship to develop.

Thomas Lea described love as “triumphant good will toward others.”¹¹ That describes perfectly the biblical picture of love—love of God for mankind, love of husband and wife, and love of friends for each other. Real people with real problems need real relationships. That is why love is so necessary. For example, pastors are not God, and we do not want to be treated as such. We want to be included as real people. That’s why I get together with a small group of fellow pastors regularly. The first letters of our names together are DSTERB. That is a perfect name for our group. We’re probably disturbed! All of us were in the doctoral program together in New Orleans. We love being together for fellowship, study, great food, and plain fun. We get

together occasionally, even after three decades. Aside from the technical information I receive from these men, I think of them as my friends whom I love. I could tell them anything and still be accepted. We keep in touch by email and phone.

Friendship gives itself away. Every true friend I have is one who is willing to give himself or herself to me in trust and mutual protection. When I was the pastor of a church in Kentucky several years ago, we had several seminary students working with us in various capacities. When Carla and I got ready to leave that church, two of the students, Reid and Jean, gave us a copy of the children's book *The Velveteen Rabbit*. They marked a place in the book that was a conversation between the Skin Horse and the Rabbit. The conversation goes like this:

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day. . . . "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."¹²

Jean and Reid were saying to me and Carla that this is what we had done for them. They wrote as their inscription, "To the Aycock

Family—A Real family which possesses the gift for helping others to feel Real.” I treasure those words, and I have often gone back to that passage in the book. It says something so intensely personal. I have taken it as a sort of model for what I want to be to others in my friendships. I cannot be this to everyone because not everyone wants it. But to those who do, I am willing to try to offer it. Only love can make for good friendship. Francis Bacon was right when he said of friendship, “It redoubleth joys, and cutteth griefs in halves.”

Love—it not only makes the world go round but also makes the trip worthwhile.

Study Questions

1. The author describes a spiritual crisis that brought back memories of the times he felt loved and protected by his birth family. Think back to the family you grew up in. Did you feel loved and wanted or did you feel more of a burden? Either way, is there anything you can do about it now?
2. Dr. Dean Ornish wrote, “Love and intimacy are at the root of what makes us sick and what makes us well.” What do you think he meant by that statement? Is it true?
3. Joseph Stalin lost his beloved wife. Afterward he said, “She was the one creature who softened my heart of stone. She is dead, and with her have died my last warm feelings for humanity.” Can this kind of loss still affect people the same way? Have you had any personal experiences like that?
4. The author mentions several friends with whom he has spent significant time. Have you had, or do you now have, friends like that? Can friends help you better understand the concept of love?
5. The chapter ends with a conversation from the children’s book *The Velveteen Rabbit* about becoming “real.” When you look in the mirror, do you see a real person? What might love have to do with your being or becoming real?

