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Part 1

**Mentoring:
The True Test**

(Character Transformation)

#1378-A

**Series: Possessing the Land:
The Process of Mentoring**

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Part 1

Mentoring: The True Test (Character Transformation)

Sometimes it seems that the fruit of the kingdom is invisible. We really can't tell what God is doing. That's probably good. If we could, we would develop legalistic guidelines by which to measure growth, and the whole concept of grace would go out the window. We look at people who claim to be walking closely with God, and if they say the right things and do the right things, we see them as spiritual. And if they are involved in many spiritual activities or have mastered a spiritual vocabulary, we view them as really growing in the Lord.

Others, who are not at the moment conforming to the religious standards we deem acceptable, or who are not responding to the same Christian challenges we think important, are considered by us and by others to be either "non-spiritual" or "hypocritical" depending upon our evaluation of their motivation. There is, of course, a problem with that system of determining spirituality. It doesn't work. We look on the outside. God looks on the heart. Only He knows what is really going on inside that life; only He knows what battles are being fought, what progress is being made, and how we would be responding were we in the midst of that very same battle.

We see behavioral weaknesses or character flaws or unwise decisions as signs that conversion has not taken place, or that the person involved is not seeking the will of God. God, however, has a totally different perspective. He knows the need of each heart and He knows what eventually will bring that heart to a deeper walk; and He sees those flaws and those weaknesses as springboards to maturity, as stepping stones out of darkness into light. God, remember, has a different manufacturing program than man does. He makes strength out of weakness. He isn't searching for our strengths to showcase; He is searching for our weaknesses to use as vehicles of change. And His biggest problem is not so much with those who are still struggling but are aware of their need to be changed; His problem is with those of us who, like the Pharisees, are more focused on the weaknesses of others

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than on our own. He said:

And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me.

And he left all, rose up, and followed him.

And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them.

But the scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?

And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.

I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.
(Luke 5:27-32)

The religious leaders of His day were shocked that Jesus would even spend time with these publicans and sinners. They didn't tell Him directly, mind you; they murmured. They started a whispering campaign. Jesus didn't waste any time. He looked directly at them, though they had avoided speaking directly to Him, and He said: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance". His message was not primarily for these religious hypocrites. It was for those who, by virtue of the known weaknesses in their lives, knew they needed something more. They knew they had a heart problem. People with heart problems know they need medical help. People with spiritual heart problems are real candidates for the word of God.

We don't, however, act as though we believe that passage. If so, we would build our churches or focus our ministries in the direction of the jails, the orphanages, the nursing homes, the half-way houses, the ghettos and the hospitals. We would be searching for ways to go to the ends of the earth where spiritually hungry masses yearn for and long for just a taste of what we take so for granted. We would be seeking, as Jesus did, to find those who were hurting and knew it.

It is no different today. There is a world of people out there who are down and out and are looking for answers, but we spend most of our time going to the "up and up" who think they have need of nothing. Thus, most of the church growth in our generation is made up of men and women who are unhappy

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where they are, and are looking for a more convenient place to be fed, encouraged, and worship. Most churches today see very few real conversions because they are unwilling to go where the unconverted are. When Jesus walked this earth, He went where sinners were; and He poured His life into a band of what you and I would call losers, knowing that it wasn't what they were then that would turn the world upside down; it was what they would become in time, were they to let their God transform their weaknesses into strengths. If I have learned anything at all in all these years, it is that you cannot predict who will go on with the Lord and who won't. Looking back, years later, I am amazed that some of those who seemed to have nothing to offer, have quietly kept on and seen God build both a life message and a life ministry. Still others, who seemed destined for spiritual greatness, have been caught up in either pride or worldliness, and have gone from potential greatness to mediocrity. The ones I have seen grow the most were the ones who seemed to have the least potential, humanly speaking. They knew it would either be God or nothing.

Mentoring is a process. It is the pouring of one life into another, the making of one life accountable to another, and the tender, but persistent commitment by one person to see that the other person keeps on growing "in ever-increasing splendor from one degree of glory to another". As we mentioned in an earlier study, perhaps the least utilized tool in our arsenal of mentoring is that of reproof. One reason is that most of us don't know how to do it in love.

We either soft-peddle blind spots, lest we offend, or we come on like some kind of spiritual guru who has all the answers. Neither will work. Our task (should we choose to accept it) is to seek the mind of God that we might learn to "speak the truth in love". Our job is to address blind spots and character flaws in those we mentor with a spirit of deep humility. Jesus put it this way,

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

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Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye;
and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of
thy brother's eye. (Matthew 7:1-5)

The matter of doing eye surgery, then, is a delicate matter, both physically and spiritually. First you must earn the right. In the physical realm, a doctor earns that right by education and experience. In the spiritual realm, you earn it by love and availability. Second, and just as important, the person you are correcting must want to be corrected. Scripture says this,

Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man,
and he will love thee. (Proverbs 9:8)

A wise son heareth his father's instruction: but a scorner
heareth not rebuke. (Proverbs 13:1)

The general rule is: rebuke or reproof is only profitable when the object of that rebuke is seeking it. All of Scripture confirms what happens when you rebuke a fool or a scorner. They simply hate you for it. So the first calling of the mentor is to read the heart of his or her disciple. Is he or she open to correction? Try first correcting them by encouraging them in an area where they seem to be unaware that there is even a weakness. Do it gently; do it in love. Then step back and watch the response.

1- First of all, is there anger or bitterness because they have been corrected?

2- Second, are they defensive or are they repentant?

3- Most important of all, as you watch in the days to come, is there a change in that area of their life? If so, you have a real disciple who wants to be corrected and is ready for spiritual surgery.

Then and only then, do you begin the process of helping them to see their needs and God's provisions where character is concerned. Remember: behavior is a reflection of character. Character is a reflection of the level of surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ. What then? First of all, you pray. Most of all, you pray. God is the only one capable of changing character, and character is the issue. The mind of Christ and the nature of God are now resident in that disciple if he or she is, indeed, a believer. That means that everything that God is, is available to meet every need they have. God may not alter their circumstances to their liking, but He will use those circumstances to change their nature into His liking, if they'll let Him.

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What does your prayer list consist of? Are you praying for Aunt Mary's leg to heal? For Johnny to get better grades? For Susie to get a boy friend? Or are you praying for Mary to learn patience? For Johnny to learn to be diligent? For Susie to change her priorities in life? Remember: Paul taught us how to pray. He said:

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; (Philippians 1:9)

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; (Colossians 1:9)

His prayers were filled with requests for character. His desire was expressed so beautifully in Ephesians 3, where he prayed:

That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

(Ephesians 3:16-19)

Learn to develop a character-related prayer list. Seek the mind of God in prayer and ask Him what reflections of His nature need to be developed in that disciple or loved one's life. Then you can pray with confidence, because:

...this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

(I John 5:14,15)

Then, whether it is a child or a disciple, we need to watch carefully and participate, as God leads, in the development of that quality which God, according to His word, wants His children to possess. One tool to accomplishing that is to understand how God turns weaknesses into strength.

To do that, you need to watch what He did with Peter and with Paul and with the others He transformed by His Spirit. Watch

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their personalities and their character prior to their spiritual transformation. Did they become perfect? Not on your life. Did they become different? Absolutely. And are there patterns to the changes in their nature? Most definitely. It is to those patterns we will look as we seek to learn to pray for and mentor those we love and those God has placed in our “spiritual baskets”. May His Spirit lead us in this crucial search for truth.

The basic truth is: God’s strength is made perfect in weakness. The reason is: our weaknesses expose a need for transformation, and lead to openness and humility. Our strengths expose natural abilities, and lead to a temptation to pride. The guy who is naturally handsome, naturally talented, naturally brilliant has to struggle to see his need for God. He first tries to do what he can, then cries out to God when it doesn’t work. He has been told all of his life how gifted he is, and so he sets out to prove it.

The so-called loser, however, suffering from a negative self-image, often feels inadequate. He’s been watching everyone else succeed. The only way he can amount to anything is for something supernatural to happen. Hallelujah! A perfect proving ground for grace. God moves in, makes something out of nothing; the believer is humbled; the world is amazed. Look carefully at who God called to build His kingdom. Fishermen. Tax-collectors. Those the world overlooked, and those the world couldn’t stand. You and I would have gone to the “Who’s Who in Israel” book and picked out the most prominent, most affluent, most successful, and thrown in a couple of scribes and Pharisees. God knew better. He chose as one of His closest friends and spokesman for the group, an angry, outspoken, prideful common man who suffered from hoof-in-mouth disease, among other things. He later added to the list a known murderer whose sole goal in life was to destroy the very church God was going to call him to build.

These two men, however, ended up as the mentors of the early church. They wrote the words that fed the church that turned the world upside down. One thing was obvious as they did. It wasn’t them. Somehow, God had come down and reached into those selfish, angry, fiercely-competitive hearts and filled them with purpose and love. From that moment on, there began in their lives a process: that process included a day-by-day transformation in which their thoughts were transformed into God’s thoughts, their nature remade into His.

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Their bitterness was overcome by grace. Their selfishness was swept away, a grain at a time, by an avalanche of love. Little by little, the very attributes that made them unlovable and unusable became the stepping stones upon which they walked into newness of life. He chose them because of what He could do with their weaknesses. That is why “not many noble, not many wise, not many mighty” were called. He did not need their resumes, He needed their hearts. He did not need to advertise how wonderful was His team; He only needed to reflect how wonderful is His grace.

That, Beloved, is still true today. So the true test of mentoring is really not how active your disciples become, nor how well they are thought of in the Christian community. The true test is: Is God literally changing their character? Are their weaknesses being addressed in prayer and are they watching in awe as God turns those very weaknesses into strengths?

Many Christians go to their graves convinced that they will always have a bad temper because God made them that way. Many even become leaders in the church while harboring a spirit of discontentment, thinking that God simply intended them to be that way. Some continue to gossip and murmur from a rebellious spirit as long as they live because they are convinced that there is nothing God can do about it. “That’s just the way I am”, they say. It may be, but it’s not the way God wants them to be.

Before the Great Physician can operate on a bad temper or a greedy spirit or a lying tongue, however, the patient must willingly come to His office and admit there is a need for surgery. That is where the mentor often comes in. As he or she observes that person or that child, he or she needs to see beyond the behavioral weaknesses to the character flaws those weaknesses represent, and lovingly, prayerfully bring them to the surface. It must be always in love, always conscious of the “beam-in-the-eye” principle but, nevertheless, always in honesty for the purpose, not of condemnation but of transformation.

Watch those God used mightily. Moses, Job, Paul. Moses had a speech impediment, and absolutely no worldly credentials, so God called him to be his spokesman to the whole world. Then there’s Job. He had it all. So, God took it all, so Job could see his own heart.

Paul experienced spiritual greatness. It was about to go to

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his head. So God inserted a physical thorn in his life to reduce him back to a dependent state. Once those weaknesses were revealed, God infused these men and others like them with a kind of strength that cannot coexist with man's abilities; and now devoid of human power, they became the men who would change their world.

The disciple or person you are mentoring who seems to be a nobody may well be that "diamond in the rough" God is waiting to use to touch lives wherever they go. The only thing missing may be a little open-heart surgery God wants to do on some of their weaknesses, turning them into expressions of His power.

Remember: every negative trait is a positive quality misused. It is a potential strength built into a man or woman that is misdirected in the flesh, but can be transformed into godliness by God's Spirit. Let's look at a few possibilities:

Here are twenty negative traits and the corresponding positive qualities that God often reveals through those very weaknesses.

NEGATIVE TRAIT	TRANSFORMED INTO:
1- Jumpiness; over-inquisitiveness	Alertness; quick to meet needs
2- Pettiness; over-attention to detail	Analytical; discernment in details
3- Sentimentalism; over-emotional	Compassion; empathy over others' needs
4- Overbearing; cocky	Confidence; boldness under pressure
5- Mischievous; devious	Creative; insights through expression
6- Inflexible; dominant	Decisive; able to choose clearly
7- Judgmental; critical	Discerning; able to evaluate wisely
8- Rigidity; unbending	Discipline; orderliness in details
9- Fanatical; aggressive	Enthusiasm; inner, productive joy
10- Wordy; melodramatic	Expressiveness; living communication
11- Indecisiveness; weakness	Flexibility; able to bend with life
12- Leniency; permissiveness	Forgiveness; able to clear offenses
13- Insensitive; disrespectful	Frankness; able to be lovingly honest

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NEGATIVE TRAIT	TRANSFORMED INTO:
14- Stingy; miserly	Frugality; able to conserve resources
15- Extravagance; wastefulness	Generosity; able to share resources
16- Self-critical; lack of confidence	Humility; assuming role of a servant
17- Blind obedience; attachment	Loyalty; faithfulness to people
18- Insensitivity; unloving	Objectivity; uninvolved discernment
19- Indifferent; disinterested	Patience; able to wait for results
20- Touchiness; easily offended	Sensitivity; able to empathize and love

Look, for instance, at how God can take an over-inquisitive or over-active “type A” personality and turn it into something wonderful. The apostle Peter was a good example of that. Prior to experiencing God’s transforming power, he was all over the place. We would call him today a “loose cannon”. “Lord, those other guys might forsake you, but not me,” was his cry (Mark 14:29). And who was it that cursed and denied he’d ever known the Lord? Peter (Mark 14:70-72).

It was Peter who tried to walk on the water and sank in Matthew 14. It was Peter who rebuked the Master in Matthew 16:22, to whom Jesus had to respond, “Get thee behind me, Satan”. It was Peter who presumptuously wanted to build three tabernacles and remain on the mount in Matthew 17. It was Peter who wanted to know how many times he had to forgive his brother in Matthew 18. It was Peter who declared he had forsaken everything to follow Jesus, and wanted to know what was in it for him in Matthew 19. And on and on it goes. It was Peter the presumptuous one, Peter the inquisitive one, Peter the over-zealous one who was willing to see himself as more spiritual than the others. Peter the prideful one, even dared to rebuke the King of Glory.

But God called Peter knowing who he was. God knew that he was an impulsive, angry, outspoken fool. But God didn’t see that when He looked at Peter. He looked at his heart. And he saw in Simon a potential rock, someone who was so committed and so single-minded, that once God’s Holy Spirit inhabited his life, that over-zealous, over-inquisitive, over-presumptuous fisherman

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would become a man whose inquisitiveness would become alertness; whose presumption would become boldness; whose zeal would be energized by grace and become the touchstone of the early church. God overlooked his weaknesses, because once Peter realized that God didn't need him, but that he needed God, there would be no limit to his usefulness in the kingdom.

It was Peter the rebel, now transformed, who called upon the early church to "lay aside all malice and guile, and hypocrisies, and envies and evil speakings." It was Peter, the former rebel, who would call upon the church to "submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." It was that same Peter who begged the young believing church to "honor all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, and honor the king." It was Peter, the self-serving aggressive one who wrote: "It is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing." Don't you see what happened?

God called a potential wild man with an explosive temper, a brash personality, and an egotistical concept of his place in the kingdom, and saw those very weaknesses as springboards for revealing the nature of God and the marks of a future leader. We would have written him off and looked for someone milder, someone quieter, someone with more discretion. Not God. He knew that the true test of mentoring was in character transformation. And He saw something in this impulsive fisherman's heart we could never see. He saw a purity and a faithfulness that, when plugged into eternity, would focus only on Jesus and never look back.

Or maybe you are someone or are mentoring someone who has an over-emotional spirit; who weeps over everything; whines over some things; worries about almost everything. You are wondering if you or he or she can ever become objective enough or emotionally stable enough to exist in the kind of warfare-weary world we live in.

Jesus knew the weaknesses that follow after an over emotional spirit. Yet He also knew that for the kingdom to be balanced, there needed to be someone who wasn't a bull in a china shop. So He looked down in eternity past and called a man named John. John must have, on occasions, crowded Jesus. He was so emotional, so intensely personal. But God knew John's heart. And God was willing to entrust to him, not only the privilege of sitting next to the Master at the final supper and of being with him on the Mount

of Transfiguration, but the incredible privilege of experiencing a vision on the Isle of Patmos, a vision so spectacular that it would change the heart of the church and give confident assurance of what was yet to come.

That had to be someone whose emotions were so attuned to the heart of God that he would be able to receive such grandeur and reflect it as the final written word from God. And God needed someone who could take the truth of God's love and communicate it in words we all could understand. So it was he who wrote, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". It was he who saw into the heart of God and called on God's people to "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." It was he who wrote: "behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." It was he who penned: "We know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." It was his expression of the mercy of God that read: "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" John the weeper became John the worshipper.

And all because God looked, not at his personality, but at his heart. We would look for someone more objective, less emotional, more in charge of his feelings, someone, maybe like Judas. God knew better. He knew that the key to fruitfulness in the kingdom lies in the balance of spiritual gifts in the body. So he gave John the gift of mercy and placed him among the three of the inner circle to demonstrate and elevate the concept of love in the body of Christ.

God does not write us off because of our perceived weaknesses, Beloved. He looks down at those weaknesses and sees what grace can do when it operates through them. Then He looks inside our oft-deceitful hearts to see if there resides there the one thing He needs to build a man or woman: a heart that beats for nothing but Him. Given that, He will take that prideful, arrogant soul who irritates everyone with his aggressive spirit and make him into a man of God. Given that, He will take that teary, over-sensitive saint who cries at the drop of a hat and make him into a spiritual giant. He will take the very raw material He created and use it as it was intended. And ever so often, it is the weaknesses in that person He is waiting to use.

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He, Beloved, is the potter. He makes every vase He creates with a different shape, different texture, different color, different resistance to breakage. He cures each at a different temperature, for He knows what it takes for each to either cure or collapse, depending on the heat. And we who long to mentor must remember how and why He does what He does. He does it to reveal His incredible strength, a strength that can only be seen when, in our weakness, we get out of the way and let Him change us into His own likeness.

Let us then glory in how we have been made. And let us then glory in what He is about to do if we will let Him. He is about to change our character into His. And that, Beloved, is the true test of mentoring. Do those you pour your life into understand that character is the real issue? Do they have an experiential grasp on the reality that God's very nature can be transferred to them, and that He desires to take the very things about them that are the most difficult, and use them as open doors to spiritual growth?

It is, however, easier to bemoan who you are and how you are than it is face the blessed reality that God knows all that and wants to take the exact vase He has created and by gently reheating it, use what appear to be flaws as the centerpiece of the beauty of the finished product.

He will take your judgmental spirit, your rigid behavior, your insensitive heart, and recreate a new vessel, one that will hold the water of life and call attention, not to itself, but to that Living Water. He wants to do that. In our next lesson, we will look at some further examples and at what we, as mentors, must learn to do.

For now, we need, however, to come to grips with the reality that the true test of mentoring is a changed life. It is a life that has seen the very things that appear to be stumblingblocks turned into stepping-stones, leading others into the kingdom. It is a life that abounds with the very expression of Christ, the very thoughts of Christ, the very words of Christ. It happens when someone loves someone else enough to help them see their blind spots, and see them not as immovable objects, but as transformable opportunities.

That is the task of the mentor. And that is the desire of God. Why, then, does it seem to happen so seldom? I believe, and I hate to admit it, that the problem lies in the Matthew 7 passage

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we looked at a moment ago. It has to do with the prerequisite for eye surgery, and it says, in effect, that God can't use eye surgeons who have huge spiritual cataracts themselves. Unless, that is, the surgeons have the surgery first. That's what the passage says. It does not say that you can't help a brother remove an obstacle from his spiritual vision. It says: "First cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

As mentors, we have the greater problem. What, in reality, is a tiny problem in our brother's life, is a major issue in ours. Why? Because we are the vessels God is using to do the surgery on them. That's why. And if we are what Jesus called in this verse "hypocrites", then the surgery is not likely to succeed. We can, in fact, do a great deal of damage in the operating room.

For the next week, then, let's make an appointment with the Great Physician and ask Him to open our eyes to the beams that are there that we are ignoring or looking around. Let's ask Him to reveal character flaws we are ignoring, and ask Him to deal with them, so we can see clearly to lovingly help those we mentor deal with theirs.

The surgery may hurt a bit. It may leave a little scar. But, Beloved, if we're going to be operating on others, we'd better take the risk and move on. Seek out the counsel of those closest to you. Take a list of the qualities in Scripture God always elevates as part of His Mind in you. And enter the operating room with confidence and joy. Learn to pray:

CHANGE MY DECEITFUL HEART

Dear God, change my deceitful heart,
Show me the needs that are there.
Help me to see from your precious word
As I beseech thee in prayer.

Where the beam in my eye is found,
Where the obstruction might be;
That I might in others behold the speck,
That removed, will help others to see.

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For Further Study and Application

Ask God to give you wisdom this week as you seek to find an honest evaluation of how you reflect the following attributes:

Availability is a state of readiness to do God's will regardless of the personal cost.

(Isaiah 6:8, Ruth 1:16, I Samuel 3:7-10)

Contentment is satisfaction with your lot in life.

(Philippians 4:11-13, I Timothy 6:6)

Correctability is openness to rebuke.

(Proverbs 13:1-18, 15:31, 27:5, 29:1, 9:8-10)

Courage is the absence of fear in the face of adversity.

(II Timothy 1:7, I Corinthians 16:13)

Discernment is the God-given, word-produced ability to see clearly issues and motives where spiritual things are concerned.

(James 3:17, Proverbs 19:27)

Faith is the ability to walk with confidence where you cannot see.

(Matthew 5:20, Hebrews 11:1,6)

Freedom from bitterness is having reached the place in life where you can joyfully accept the sovereignty of God.

(Ephesians 4:3, Hebrews 12:15, Proverbs 18:14)

Gentleness is the spirit that responds with consistent love on all occasions.

(James 3:17, I Thessalonians 2:7, Galatians 5:23, II Timothy 2:24)

Grateful spirit is a heart that remains appreciative regardless of the circumstances.

(Ephesians 5:20, Philippians 4:6)

Humility is the attitude that accepts last place as deserved.

(James 4:10, I Peter 5:5,6, Proverbs 15:33,

Proverbs 25:6,7 Proverbs 27:2, Proverbs 29:23)

Ask your mate or someone who knows you well to give you input as well.

Pray for those attributes you lack, claiming I John 5:14,15.

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