

FOUR

PURPOSE LIVED



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Imagine trying to put together a desk. After you assemble the first few pieces, you think you've got the hang of it. You discard the instructions and continue on until you come to the end, only to discover a few pieces left over. All that work and effort were wasted because your focus wasn't in the right place. You still have a desk, but it's not exactly right. In the same way, we might try to find meaning through doing all kinds of good. People give time, money, and resources to lots of causes, and while a measure of good might be accomplished, there's still a greater good missed. We only find that greater good and live out our purpose when we're led by and filled with the Spirit.

THE POINT

We live out our _____ as we are led and filled with the Spirit.

Galatians is unique among Paul's letters. First, unlike Ephesus, Colossae, or Corinth, Galatia is a region rather than a city. This letter was meant to be read in not just one church but around a group of churches. The book is also unique in its tone. Galatians doesn't contain Paul's typical expression of thanksgiving for the believers in the church; instead, he launched directly into a blistering rebuke of the Christians for abandoning the gospel he preached to them—that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Rather, the Galatians adopted a legalistic approach whereby they added other elements to their faith, believing this combination was necessary for salvation. In this call to return to the purity of faith, we can understand what life in the Spirit is like.

Galatians 5:16-18 ¹⁶ I say, then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

1) Walking by the _____ keeps us from fulfilling sinful desires.

Though when we come to Christ, we're new creations, remnants of our sinful old self remain. This old self is what Paul called the "flesh," and he was well aware of the constant battle within every Christian. Just as the remnants of the flesh remain, so also are we now, in Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is constantly working to move us toward God's aim for us to be molded into the image of Christ. The challenge is, by faith, for us to walk by the Spirit daily.

Galatians 5:19-21 ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

2) Walking in the _____ leads to sinful behavior.

Every Christian is engaged in a moment-by-moment battle. We're sometimes more aware of that battle than at other times, but the battle is present, nevertheless. Every Christian, then, must choose which way to walk. If we allow ourselves to walk according to the flesh, we'll find ourselves involved in what A. W. Tozer called "the fine threads of the self-life." Though Paul's list in this passage isn't exhaustive, each one of these behaviors has "self" at the center. When we walk in the flesh, we'll seek to gratify ourselves with each step.

Galatians 5:22-26 ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things. ²⁴ Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

3) Walking by the Spirit produces _____ character.

God's will for every Christian is to be conformed to the image of Christ. This is an inside-out kind of growth. In Christ, our hearts have been changed. What's left is for our thoughts, feelings, and behavior to be brought in line with our inner reality. This is a lifelong process of growth. Just as a tree will produce fruit that displays the type of tree it is, so also will the Holy Spirit produce fruit in our lives in line with who we've become in Christ.

ENGAGE

The fruit of the Spirit is a list of attributes displayed in those who walk with the Holy Spirit. From the list below, circle one attribute and take a few moments to pray that God will give you opportunities to grow in that characteristic this week.

Love	Joy	Peace	Patience	Kindness
Goodness	Faithfulness	Gentleness	Self-control	

LIVE IT OUT

What actions will you take in response to today's study?

- **Reflect.** Read through the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23. In a journal or on a sheet of paper, record instances from the past year in which you can look back and see the Holy Spirit was working in your life to grow that fruit.
- **Encourage.** Seek out a friend for coffee and engage in a conversation about where you see the Spirit of God working right now in each other's lives.
- **Serve.** We're to keep in step with the Spirit of God. In what area of service might God be calling you to keep in step with Him? Contact a ministry where you feel led to contribute—inside your church or in your community—and ask about opportunities to serve.

TALK IT OUT

Want to go a step further? Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read Galatians 5:16-26, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.

The Holy Spirit is one of the most vital, yet most neglected parts of the Christian life. Though every Christian is indwelt with the Holy Spirit, most of us pay little attention to what He's doing in and through us on a daily basis. Part of growing in Christ is learning to recognize and embrace the work of the Spirit of God. Only when we do this can we keep in step with Him and live out our true meaning and purpose.

- ? **What's the first image that comes to mind when you think about the Holy Spirit? How might that image be in or out of line with what the Bible describes?**
- ? **Read Ephesians 5:15-21. Based on these verses, what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? How does this change your understanding of keeping in step with the Spirit?**
- ? **Read Ephesians 4:25-32. What, based on this passage, does it mean to grieve the Spirit? Are there any patterns in your life right now that are causing the Holy Spirit grief? Share them with the group and commit to support and encourage each other this week.**

DAY 1: When we walk, we're going somewhere.

Read Galatians 5:16-18.

Walk is a word the Bible frequently uses to describe what life in faith is like. Consider Micah 6:8: "Mankind, he has told each of you what is good and what it is the LORD requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God."

In the book of Ephesians, Paul uses the word to describe how a Christ-follower is supposed to live with Jesus: Walk worthy (4:1). Walk in love (5:1). Walk in good works (2:10).

Genesis 5:21-24 tells us of a curious character we know very little about who walked with God: "Enoch was 65 years old when he fathered Methuselah. And after he fathered Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and fathered other sons and daughters. So Enoch's life lasted 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was not there because God took him."

In the book of Galatians, we're told to "walk by the Spirit" (5:16). In thinking about this metaphor, there are at least three characteristics of walking that teach us about life with the Holy Spirit. Walking is:

- **Active.** We don't walk by accident; it's a choice to do so, and it takes real effort. Similarly, we don't accidentally walk by the Spirit; we must actively choose to submit our will to His will.
- **Progressive.** When we walk, we're going somewhere. There's a destination to which we're headed. When we walk by the Spirit, the destination isn't a place, but a way of being. We're moving toward Christlike character.
- **Steady.** Walking isn't the same as running; it's steadier than that. Step by step, mile by mile, we move forward at a steady pace. Likewise, it can sometimes seem that our progress with the Holy Spirit is slow, but it's always steady. It will take a lifetime, but the Spirit will walk with us until we're made into the image of Jesus.

- 🕒 **Get together with a trusted Christian mentor and ask this person to share what he or she has learned about walking by the Spirit.**

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One does not surrender a life in an instant. That which is lifelong can only be surrendered in a lifetime.

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Elisabeth Elliot

DAY 2: We must always be ready for a fight.

Read Galatians 5:17.

Every Christian should wake up each day alert and battle-ready. If not, we walk through our day lethargically at our own peril. A wanderer on the savannah walks with an awareness of prowling predators, and the soldier on the battlefield moves carefully through the war-torn landscape. Yet, we lazily move through our days being surprised when we meet any amount of temptation or struggle with our flesh. We didn't wake up ready for a fight, and yet the fight is nevertheless coming for us.

Part of the reason we aren't ready is because the fight that's coming isn't just from the outside; it's from the inside. There's a near-constant conflict between the Spirit of God, who lives in our hearts, and the remnants of our old selves. The battle is over who will be the acknowledged lord and master of our lives. Will it be Jesus, or will we try to remain the master of our own destiny? Will we bow the knee of our hearts before Him, or will we insist on having our own way? The battle rages on in every thought, decision, and attitude.

As Christians, we battle from a posture of weakness in our own ability and yet with full confidence in the strength of Jesus. The war has been won; evil has been defeated; the Christian will reign victoriously with Jesus in the end. We'll be made into the image of Jesus; the Spirit will eventually have His way. This assured victory doesn't make us lazy; it makes us ever more ready to fight on.

So, what should be the posture of the Christian, knowing that the fight is coming? It's a posture of awareness. It's waking up knowing that today will bring challenges into our path that will hold spiritual implications. It's rising from bed knowing that in a myriad of ways, we'll be asked through these attacks to bear witness with our words, actions, and attitudes as to whether or not we truly believe in the sufficiency of Jesus.

Wake up tomorrow, Christian, with the assurance of a conquering Jesus. And wake knowing that this assurance leads to a posture of readiness for the fight that's to come.

- 🕒 **Commit to spending time in prayer each morning, asking God to prepare and equip you for the day ahead and the fights that will inevitably come.**

BE READY



DAY 3: We're always growing an appetite.

Read Galatians 5:17-21.

Living things grow. It's true for every organic life form, but it's also true of us spiritually. When we're born again in Christ, we're set on a trajectory of spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit in us empowers this transformational process by which God grows us into the likeness of His Son. We continually grow in the fruit of the Spirit as our character is developed, but the opposite is also true. Either we're abiding in Christ and bearing fruit, or we're withering away. Growing or dying.

We're always, always, always growing an appetite. For example, you probably didn't drink coffee in the mornings as an eight-year-old. You might have even found it distasteful. But over the years, your appetite grew. Perhaps when you first picked up the Bible, tried to have a time of sustained prayer, or attempted to memorize Scripture, you found it incredibly difficult. But you took a disciplined approach, and your appetite grew over time. You desire things that you once didn't desire, and you have the capacity for things that you didn't have capacity for before.

Human beings are like rubber bands in this way—when we begin something, it feels very stretching. But the more we do it, the more we get stretched out and we find our capacity and appetite for that thing increases. Unfortunately, sin works this way as well. We might look at someone who has fallen hard and deep into a sinful pattern and think to ourselves, *I'd never be where that person is*. And yet, that person didn't get there overnight. Likely, his or her appetite grew. And grew. And grew. That person was stretched and stretched and stretched.

We're always growing an appetite, either for sin or for godliness, and that appetite is grown through our everyday choices. That fact ought to make us consider those seemingly harmless choices we make a thousand times a day, because whether we know it or not, those choices are food. They're helping grow our appetites.

? Which appetite is winning out in your life? What choices do you need to make to ensure you're growing an appetite for the things of God? Write your thoughts in the margin.

DAY 4: Christians can't be fruit pickers.**Read Galatians 5:22-23.**

Sometimes we think of Christianity as a buffet line. We can pick and choose what we think tastes good and leave everything else behind. We engage in relationships with people who make us feel good about ourselves. We choose activities based on what we're best at and enjoy the most. We put ourselves in situations where we have opportunities to display our best attributes. In many areas of life, we belly up to the buffet and choose that which tastes the best, regardless of whether it's going to make us healthier.

Once we come to Christ, the Holy Spirit does His work of transformation in our hearts. He forms us into the image of Christ, growing us into His likeness in our thoughts, actions, and behaviors. Paul wrote about this work of the Spirit in Galatians using the agricultural metaphor of fruit. No doubt there are some attributes of the fruit of the Spirit that are more to our liking. Things that "taste" better to us because we're naturally bent toward them. Our personality and makeup might be such that we're naturally joyful. Or naturally patient. Or naturally peaceful and laid back.

But other attributes on this list may run completely against the grain of our personality. We're naturally spontaneous, not self-controlled. We're naturally critical, not kind. We're naturally direct and abrasive, not gentle. But we don't get to pick and choose. Notice that these are the "fruit" of the Spirit. And the word "fruit" is singular. It's a package deal—all or nothing. That means we don't get to be fruit pickers.

The Holy Spirit doesn't allow us to fall back on the excuse of our personality; He's not content to acknowledge our natural shortcomings. What He will do is grow us up in all these attributes, even the uncomfortable ones.

The response to the work of the Spirit in our lives, then, is very simple: willing and joyful submission. To walk through the day believing the Spirit is at work in and through us to make us into the likeness of God's Son. Not to hold onto our natural personality traits or to use them as a crutch for our behavior.

? Which attributes of the fruit of the Spirit show up most frequently in your life? Which show up less often? Invite the Holy Spirit to work in your life to grow these weaker areas.

DAY 5: Keeping in step helps us avoid pitfalls.

Read Galatians 5:25.

Galatians 5 has quite a bit to say about walking, particularly walking in and with the Spirit of God. Here, Paul contrasted life in the Spirit with life lived in slavery to the flesh. We live our lives in motion, and as such, we should make sure we're walking in the way of truth and light—that of the Spirit of God. In walking forward with the Spirit as our constant companion, we're less likely to divert our path into the byways of the flesh. We should, according to Paul, “keep in step with the Spirit” (v. 25).

Keeping in step with the Spirit assumes that we're living by the Spirit. But even when we're living by the Spirit, there might be times we aren't necessarily “in step” with Him. Our pace might vary from the Spirit's pace in one of two ways:

- **We might walk too slowly and fall behind in laziness.** This is an easy mistake to make. We start falling behind when we assume that a life of faith is a life of passivity. That faith looks like just waiting around for God to bring the opportunities for His glory right into our path. A life of faith isn't stationary; rather, it's a bold march forward assuming that as we walk with Jesus in His will and Word, we'll come across gospel-laden opportunities as we're in motion.
- **We might walk too quickly and run ahead in presumption.** We may also get out of step by charging ahead. We do this when we assume we know what's best, which way is right, and what must be done. We can easily get out of step when we take matters into our own hands; seeing a situation in front of us, we determine what action ought to be taken. Here, too, we're out of step, and here, too, we're on dangerous ground.

Keeping in step means avoiding the pitfalls of laziness and presumption, and the answer to both is walking in faith. It's faith that we're not walking aimlessly, nor are we walking alone. Instead, we're walking in step with the One who knows and will show us the way at the right time.

- 🎯 **When you pray today, focus on how you can keep in step with the Spirit. Ask for an awareness of the times when you may be getting ahead or falling behind.**