



# Purpose Lived

## THE POINT

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

## THE PASSAGE

Galatians 5:16-26

### QUESTION 1:

***What's something people in your hometown love to brag about?***

## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In 1901, oil was discovered in Texas, right at the time America would begin craving oil. Prior to this, oil was used chiefly for kerosene lamps. But the dawn of the 20th century brought with it the invention of the internal combustion engine. Cars, airplanes, and the neighbor kid's noisy little motorbike soon followed. Suddenly, we had a great need for oil—and lots of it.

A lot of Texans were just eking out an existence until oil was discovered. Great wealth lay under people's land in Beaumont, but it wasn't doing them any good. It wasn't until a mining engineer named Anthony Lucas drilled a well that sent oil gushing up 1,000 feet in the air. With the oil came prosperity for so many.

Most of us live our lives like it's 1900 in Beaumont, Texas. We're getting by without ever realizing the great potential that resides within us. If you are a follower of Christ, He has placed His Holy Spirit in you. The same God who brought this universe into existence and raised Jesus from the dead is living in you!

## 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.

Once we come to Christ and we have a newfound purpose in Him, one might think all our problems disappear. Nope. We've been freed from the penalty and power of sin, but sin doesn't want to roll over and play dead. Sin is a habit too many of us are used to, and we easily give in to the pull of the old sin nature. Paul referred to this as "the flesh" (v. 16), that nature we're all born with that once enslaved us to sin.

The antidote to the old sin nature does not reside in our ability. We don't simply try harder not to sin. We've been given the Holy Spirit. The moment you trust Christ for salvation, He comes to live in you through the presence of His Holy Spirit. God Himself comes to indwell you and empower you to holy living.

Many terms could be used to describe the Christian life, but my favorite is the one Paul used: a walk.

The Christian life is a journey. As we walk through life, Christ walks with us. As we encounter challenges along the way, His Holy Spirit strengthens us to stand strong. It's a journey toward Christlikeness that will only end one day when we stand face-to-face before God Himself.

Paul emphasized this walk to the Christians in Galatia because others were telling them to follow the Jewish practices outlined in the Old Testament law. But Christ set them free from rule-following. Instead of walking in accordance with a bunch of dos and don'ts, we're to "walk by the Spirit" (v. 16). The Spirit equips us and empowers us to live in full obedience to God.

Let me state this plainly and bluntly: The only way any of us can do what is right is when we walk by the Spirit. Relying on any aspect of ourselves—the flesh—won't cut it.

## DIGGING DEEPER

### Walk By the Spirit

The Greek term for *walk* (*peripateo*) literally means to physically walk, but it is also used in reference to a person's lifestyle—how one lives or conducts oneself. The walk Paul was referring to is the Spirit-controlled life of the believer. The Christian must be intentional in how he or she lives (Eph. 5:15-21), in moment-by-moment dependence upon the indwelling Holy Spirit. In Galatians, Paul described this as walking by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), being led by the Spirit (v. 18), living by the Spirit (v. 25a), and keeping in step with the Spirit (v. 25b).

While walking by the Spirit is done in the power and by the leading of the Holy Spirit, the believer must be intentional (day-by-day, moment-by-moment) in appropriating the Spirit's power by faith, choosing to reject the desires of the old sin nature ("take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires," Eph. 4:22) and choosing to walk (live) according to the new nature ("put on the new self," Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10) in obedience to God (Rom. 8:4).

Walking by the Spirit is the life-long process of being transformed in Christlikeness (also known as sanctification). Walking by the Spirit is intentionally living as God would have us live.

In fact, the flesh will always pull us in the opposite direction. The "flesh . . . and the Spirit" (v. 17) are at war within the believer. The desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit are not merely different, they "are opposed to each other" (v. 17). They are incompatible. The flesh will always lead us to sin, but the Spirit leads us to forsake sin and pursue the purity to which God has called us.

We see this in the phrase, "You don't do what you want" (v. 17). You may want to do what God desires, but your flesh entices you to fail, resulting in sin. This was clearly Paul's view in Romans 7:14-25, where

he said his flesh caused him to fail at doing what he really wanted to do. Think about the last time you failed. Perhaps you lost your temper and yelled at someone. Was that really what you wanted to do? If you yelled at someone you cared about, you probably found yourself apologizing for your actions, or worse, living with an uncomfortable tension in that relationship. In our public and private lives, we find ourselves doing the very things we said we would never do again. We find ourselves struggling with the flesh.

The solution is simple: walk by the Spirit. But how do we do that?

When Paul wrote to the Colossian believers, he instructed them to “set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Col. 3:2). When our minds are occupied with the things of this world, we have difficulty keeping in step with the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, when we intentionally think about, dwell on, and meditate on the things of God’s kingdom, we

find the Spirit leading our lives more easily. Saturating our minds with Scripture has a way of pushing out the ways of this world!

#### QUESTION 2:

*How can we know whether we’re being guided by the Holy Spirit or by our flesh?*

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## 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.

Paul illustrated the difference between walking by the flesh and walking by the Spirit by offering lists of those actions and attitudes that characterize each. He began with “the works of the flesh” and noted that these works “are obvious” (v. 19). Unfortunately, the “obvious” nature of sin is not always recognized in our society. Our culture is seeking to normalize what the Bible identifies

as sin, but for the Christ-follower, the one who has been indwelt by the Spirit and given a new purpose, these flesh-based characteristics should be obvious. We can divide these characteristics and works of the flesh into four groups.

1. **Sexual sins.** These include “sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity” (v. 19).



*Sexual immorality* is a general term referring to any illicit sexual activity. The word translated *moral impurity* means “unclean” or “dirty.” Paul used it to refer to moral filth. The word translated *promiscuity* can also be translated as “sensuality” or “lewdness.” Paul used the three terms together to sum up the whole realm of sexual sins from premarital sex to adultery to pornography to lustful thoughts.

2. **Spiritual infidelity.** When people commit “idolatry” and “sorcery” (v. 20), they’re looking to other things as their gods. *Idolatry* involved the worship of “gods” made by human hands. That’s still a temptation in many places in the world today, but Paul also identified greed as idolatry (Col. 3:5). Idolatry occurs when we place anything before the lordship of Christ. The word translated *sorcery* is *pharmakia* from which we get the word *pharmacy*. In sorcery, the use of drugs was often accompanied by incantations and appeals to occultic forces.
3. **Relational sins.** These are sins seen in our relationships: “hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger” (Gal. 5:20). Each of these sins creates tension

with others, erects barriers between people, and destroys relationships. Whether it’s the cold stare of hatred or the hot outburst of vicious and angry words, these actions embody the flesh. Relational sins include improper leadership and divisions between people. Paul added “selfish ambitions” (v. 20). Ambition isn’t necessarily a bad thing, but it becomes so when personal drive or desires are placed before the needs of others.

“Dissensions” and “factions” (v. 20) are two ways of dividing people. Paul addressed such ruptures in the fellowship of the Corinthian church. “Envy” (v. 21) is also disruptive to relationships. One scholar described envy well: “Envy is the desire, born of bitterness, to see a person deprived of the rewards his or her virtues and efforts have justly won, whether one wants such for oneself . . . or simply wishes the other to be stripped of them.”<sup>1</sup>

4. **Sins of decadence.** Paul warned against “drunkenness” and “carousing” (v. 21). *Carousing* is mentioned three times in the New Testament (Rom. 13:13; 1 Pet. 4:3). Each time it is linked to drunkenness and identified

with wild parties. A lifestyle of indulgence, including drinking and boisterous behavior, is inconsistent with the life of a Christian.

This list of sinful actions is neither exhaustive nor complete. Paul concluded with “and anything similar” (v. 21), but he has painted a clear enough picture of what sin looks like. Paul’s conclusion is sobering: “Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (v. 21). Any Christian can look at that list and see something they’ve done wrong, even as a follower of Christ. Christians can still struggle with anger and envy. Lust enters the mind. Unfortunately, a Christian who hasn’t drunk alcohol in years can give into that temptation.

We can even engage in envy over the way God has blessed someone else!

Yes, we still sin, but Paul’s warning about those who won’t inherit the kingdom of God is about “those who practice such things” (v. 21). These people have a regular practice of sinning. This is continuous behavior for them. Living in the flesh is a lifestyle. Anyone who calls himself a Christian but lives a blatant, ongoing life of sin is someone showing no evidence of salvation. “So you’ll recognize them by their fruit” (Matt. 7:20).

**QUESTION 3:**

***What are the consequences of tolerating works of the flesh in our lives?***

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## **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.

Paul followed his list of fleshly traits with a list of characteristics of the one who walks by the Spirit. Paul identified these traits as “fruit” (v. 22), which is such an apt description in light of Jesus’s description of our relationship with Him as the vine and the branches.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me” (John 15:5).

The fruit Paul described is what the Spirit produces in us. Just as the branches get their sustenance from the vine, we look to Christ, walk by His Spirit, and the fruit listed is the result. Consider how we live out the fruit listed in three groups.

### **Fruit tied to our hearts and minds.**

- **Love** is key in the life of the Christian. Love permeates all of God’s work from creation to His interactions with humanity. This includes the biggest display of His love through the death of Christ. God pours into our hearts His love (Rom. 5:5).
- **Joy** is the inward experience produced by the grace of God that

enables us to enjoy and celebrate life in Christ no matter what circumstances or challenges we may be facing.

- **Peace** is related to the Hebrew term *shalom*, which is more than the absence of conflict; it carries the idea of wholeness and well-being.

### **Fruit tied to our relationships.**

- **Patience** means that the believer has a long temper (as opposed to a short fuse). Unrestrained anger is the work of the flesh, but those who walk by the Spirit are slow to anger. When the Holy Spirit takes control, we take on the traits of God who is “slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth” (Ex. 34:6).
- **Kindness** means being helpful and honest with others and treating them well. It overlaps in meaning with goodness.
- **Goodness** refers to the generous attitude believers are to have toward others. It involves acting in good ways toward others.

### **Fruit tied to our conduct.**

- **Faithfulness** means to be trustworthy and reliable.
- **Gentleness** describes a person who has a teachable spirit in



## ENGAGE

The fruit of the Spirit is a list of character traits displayed in those who walk with the Holy Spirit. From the list below, mark one attribute and take a few moments to pray that God would give you opportunities to grow in that trait this week.

Love	Joy	Peace
Patience	Kindness	Goodness
Faithfulness	Gentleness	Self-control

relation to God, A submissive, humble attitude before God is seen in the humility and consideration we show toward others.

- **Self-control** involves mastery over our emotions, impulses, desires, and passions. Living by the Spirit means bringing our conduct under His control.<sup>2</sup>

It's only when we walk by the Spirit that we are able to live out our purpose and display these godly character traits.

### QUESTION 4:

***What does walking by the Spirit look like?***

Paul reminded us that, when it comes to the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the “law is not against such things” (Gal. 5:23). When we walk in the

Spirit, we naturally live as God desires. The law can't make us good, but the Spirit dwelling in us has the power to change us.

The solution for the war that rages within us is two-fold. First, we already “have crucified the flesh” (v. 24). Paul used graphic language to show that, when we came to Christ in faith and repentance, we crucified the “passions and desires” (v. 24) of the flesh. Thus, we can't go back to the old way of living. Second, now that we are in Christ and indwelt by His Holy Spirit, we are to “live by the Spirit” and “keep in step with the Spirit” (v. 25).

### QUESTION 5:

***What has helped you maintain a Spirit-directed lifestyle?***

## LIVE IT OUT

Living out God’s purpose depends on your walking by the Spirit. What will you do with that truth this week?

**Assess your walk.** Examine your life for areas where you follow the flesh. Confess those sins, turn from them, and ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit. Commit to following Christ and letting His Spirit work His godly character in you.

**Invest time.** Walking by the Spirit requires setting aside time for Him. Determine when and where you can meet God each day. Make it an unwavering habit to spend time with God every day.

**Redirect your thoughts.** Begin the habit of relying on the Spirit, so that your thoughts are honoring to Christ. Toward this end, memorize Philippians 4:8: “Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things.”

1. David A. DeSilva, *New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 462.

2. Adapted from the Senior Adult Leader Guide commentary.

