

introduction

As we conclude our series on the Holy Spirit, this week's passage brings us to one of the most important questions we can ask: What does the Spirit-filled life actually look like? Throughout this series, we have explored who the Holy Spirit is and how he works in the life of believers. Now in Galatians 5:22-26, we see the tangible outworking of his presence in transformed character. Paul's description of the fruit of the Spirit challenges us to consider how God changes us from the inside out and how that shapes our relationships, communities, and daily lives. We are also led to imagine what it would look like for our church community to reflect these qualities in our shared life together.



If those closest to you could say you are especially known for one quality or character trait, what do you think they would say?

read

Galatians 5:22-26 (NIV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture. Share some insights, questions, or points that strike you. Then read what follows.

context

In the apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians, he particularly emphasizes the importance of the Christian's freedom from the law. He was writing to churches that were struggling with the temptation to slip back into legalism, believing they had to strictly follow ancient Jewish laws — emblemized by the practice of circumcision — to be truly right with God. In Galatians 5:22-26, Paul argues that genuine change comes not by following the external authority of the law but by the inside-out transformation through the Holy Spirit. A life truly liberated by grace

will be seen not primarily in moral improvement but in the Spirit organically producing the character of Christ in individuals and loving harmony in the Christian community.

the Spirit's fruit

When a person becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit comes to reside in them. And like a seed, the life of the Spirit will begin to grow inside the believer and produce fruit that reflects what God is like: traits like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This means that the mark of a genuine Christian is visible change where we are increasingly becoming more like Jesus, especially as it manifests in a life of love.

Just as organic botanical growth is slow, the growth of the Christian is often slow and gradual. While this may sometimes feel discouraging, in truth it is incredibly encouraging because such good fruit will surely and eventually grow in the person who walks by the Spirit ([Galatians 5:16](#)). The kind of fruit that's produced will be deep, rich, and complex, and it will savor of the sweetness of Christ. While Paul's list of nine traits is not exhaustive, it provides a snapshot of what this kind of look looks like.

Love toward others is the response and overflow of experiencing God's love towards us in Christ. Joy is a settled state of delight in God that exists even in the midst of pain and trials. Peace denotes a sense of "personal wholeness and beneficial relationships" that mark a believer's life in the various spheres of home, community, and the world (Longenecker). Forbearance (patience) is that quality where we are not easily offended but patiently endure wrong without anger or vengeance. Kindness is extending benevolence, especially to those who are not loving in return. God is "kind to the ungrateful and wicked" ([Luke 6:35](#)), and "love is kind" ([1 Corinthians 13:4](#)). Goodness can have a general wide-ranging meaning, but in this context it may mean a generosity and magnanimity toward others even when it's not required. Faithfulness means being worthy of trust because we are reliable and loyal and can be counted on. Gentleness is "the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance," sometimes translated as "humility" or "meekness," which expresses itself in considerateness toward others rather than an arrogant and self-assertive spirit. Self-control is the ability to restrain oneself, or demonstrating mastery over one's desires.

“For mere improvement is not redemption, though redemption always improves people even here and now and will, in the end, improve them to a degree we cannot yet imagine. God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man.”

—C.S. Lewis

discuss

1. Which of the nine traits in the fruit of the Spirit feels the most natural to you right now? Which one is the most challenging?
2. Do you find the dynamic of spiritual growth to be discouraging or encouraging? Why?
3. How have you seen spiritual growth happen gradually in your own life or in someone else's?

the conflict between flesh and Spirit

This passage teaches us that the life of a Christian will be marked by internal conflict. This is so because there are two opposing powers present in the believer's life: the *flesh* and the *Spirit*. Before a person becomes a Christian, their life is ruled only by the flesh. Paul's use of the term "flesh" (Greek: *sarx*) in this passage is not referring to the physical dimension of our bodily existence. Rather, it refers to the inherently corrupt nature in all human beings that manifests in opposing God, saying "my will be done" instead of "thy will be done." But when a person becomes a Christian, the Spirit now comes to live inside them, and this results in a battle of opposing desires. Because of this, the normal experience of the Christian in this life will be marked by this kind of inner spiritual conflict.

But the believer ought not to despair even in the face of this reality, for they can be assured of hope and victory. Those who “walk by the Spirit” can be assured that they “will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (5:16). The key to spiritual growth is not by trying harder to restrain ourselves in following the law. Rather, it comes by doing two things. First, we must learn to “crucify the flesh” (v. 24). In the language we used a couple weeks ago, this is “mortifying sin,” or putting sin and its desires to death. Practically, this means discovering the deeper idols that we feel like we must have and can’t live without, and repenting of them. Second, we must learn to “keep in step with the Spirit” (v. 25). The Spirit desires what is contrary to the flesh, and what is it that the Spirit most deeply desires? The glory of Jesus. Practically, this means discovering more and more of the beauty of Jesus, and how Jesus fulfills what we were looking for from our idols.

The passage ends with a warning against conceit, provoking one another, and envying one another. This reminds us that spiritual formation is deeply connected to community life. Pride and comparison damage relationships and distort spiritual growth. A Spirit-led community is marked not by competition or self-promotion, but by humility, encouragement, and mutual love.

discuss

- 4. What is the difference between trying harder to obey the law and allowing the Spirit to lead and transform us?**
- 5. What does it practically mean for you to “crucify the desires of the flesh”? Is this a one-time decision or a daily practice?**
- 6. What does it practically look like for you to “keep in step with the Spirit” in your everyday life? What habits or practices help you become more attentive to the Spirit’s work in your life?**
- 7. Why do pride, comparison, and envy so often disrupt the “fruit” of love and peace in Christian community?**

group reflection

This was the final study in our series on the Holy Spirit. As you reflect back, what are some key takeaways from this series that you want to keep in mind and work out in your own life?

upcoming

- Saturday, June 6 | **Homelessness: Learning From Experience, 1:30-3:30 pm, Location TBA**
Join Open Hearts Initiative staff and community members in learning about the experiences of their unhoused neighbors and to build connections in a casual setting.
<https://openheartsinitiative.org/events/hlfejun2026>
- Sunday, June 7 | **Church Family Meal, after service**
Get to know other congregants during the meal or if interested in helping serve food, sign up below.
redeemerws.com/cfmvolunteer
- Sunday, June 14 | **All Angels' Community Meal, 5:35-7:15 pm** at All Angels' Church (W 80th St & Broadway)
Volunteer with other Redeemer West Siders to serve and share a sit-down meal for the All Angels' community, including our neighbors experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.
redeemerws.com/allangels