

Fruit of the Spirit:
Plant, Cultivate, & Grow



7 Lessons on Galatians 5:16-25

By Kathy Howard

www.kathyhoward.org

Unshakeable Faith for Life

Introduction

About six weeks ago I planted two fruit trees – one lemon and one lime. I carefully placed them in large pots on the patio using the soil recommended by the nursery for citrus trees. Both received the same amount of sun and water. Both bloomed. Both had numerous visits from bees and butterflies.

The two trees have had the same care and nurturing, but the fruit production has been drastically different. The lemons seem to be growing overnight. The flexible young tree branches curve down under their weight. My husband and I anticipate large slices of the tangy fruit for our iced tea later in the summer.

In contrast, the limes look pitiful. When the blooms faded, tiny little fruit balls emerged, but only two or three have grown much. Many have turned brown and dropped off. God intended for both trees to grow fruit, but only one is fulfilling its purpose.

God also intends for us, His children, to bear fruit. According to Jesus, when we follow Him closely our lives will produce “much” fruit (John 15:5). Is your life producing an abundant harvest or are you in serious need of some spiritual fertilizer? Whether we need some major pruning or just a little shaping up, all of us could benefit from studying and applying what God’s Word says about the fruit of the Spirit.

Here are a few things we’ll learn in *Fruit of the Spirit: Plant, Cultivate, & Grow*

- What are the characteristics of a “fruitless” life?
- What does it mean to “live by the Spirit?”
- Just what is “fruit” anyway?
- Am I “fruity?”
- What should the fruit of the Spirit look like in my life?
- How can I improve my harvest?

Each week as we study together we will ***Plant*** God’s truth in our hearts, ***Cultivate*** our own lives to receive that truth, and take action to help it ***Grow!***

Lesson One

THE PROPER CLIMATE

“Stop, you’re killing me!”

Which of the following scenes produced the statement above?

- A teenage boy won’t stop tickling his little sister.
- A middle-aged woman just scored 75 points against her Scrabble partner.
- A masked man is beating a defenseless elderly woman.

Does it matter? Absolutely! In the first two cases, the statement is meant to be teasing and playful. But the last scenario is life and death! We must know the *context* of the statement to know if we should laugh or call 911.

Likewise, before we can understand and apply Galatians 5:16-26, we must know its *context*. Too often, we misunderstand and misuse God’s Word because we attempt to interpret a verse or passage apart from the whole.

Where do we begin? Context of Galatians

The way God chooses to *apply* the truths found in His Word can vary with the individual and their circumstance. However the *meaning* of a biblical passage never changes. It will always mean what God originally intended for it to mean. Before we can make application to our lives we must have a good grasp of the original meaning by considering the larger *context*. (For more information on biblical context read “Context is King” at DoNotDepart.com.)

Galatians is a letter written to a specific people at a specific point in history for a specific purpose. Therefore, we need to know *who*, *when*, and *why* to understand the meaning.

Read Galatians 1:1-9 and gives as many facts as possible about the following:

Author of this letter -

Recipients of this letter -

Purpose of this letter -

Many of you are probably familiar with Paul’s background and dramatic conversion. If not, you can get a good overview by reading the personal account of his story in Acts 22:1-21. A couple of pertinent facts about Paul is 1) he was raised a zealous Jew thoroughly trained in the law and 2) when Christ saved him God called him to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.

The recipients of Paul's letter – the churches in Galatia - were comprised of mostly *Gentile* Christians who had been saved out of paganism. They had received Christ and the Holy Spirit by faith and had never observed the Jewish Law.

Purpose of Galatians

Understanding why Paul wrote to the Galatians will help us understand the “Fruit of the Spirit” and how it’s produced in our lives. Paul was concerned about false teaching in the churches, a “different gospel” which he refers to in Galatians 1:6.

Jewish Christians, who still held to the Law of Moses, had infiltrated these Gentile believers and falsely taught that they must observe the Jewish law to be Christians. These “Judaizers” were concerned that faith without the discipline of the law would lead to immorality, but their teaching had only minimized God’s grace and created a warped form of “Christianity.”

Paul, recognizing the danger, wrote to remind the Galatians of the truth of the Gospel message and to protect them from this false teaching. The letter emphasizes God’s grace while upholding God’s call to righteousness by living a life following the Spirit.

Read Galatians 5:1-12. Based on the passage and what we learned above list all the negative consequences of trying to live by the law.

Read Galatians 5:13-15. In addition to the Judaizers’ legalism, what other problem within these Gentile churches did Paul address?

Apparently the Galatians were using their “freedom” as an excuse to follow their sinful desires and they were hurting their fellow believers in the process. Paul longed for the Galatians to experience the freedom and unity only found in Christ while living a holy life that pleased God. That is also our goal! But freedom cannot be found in observing the Law. And indulging our sinful nature will never produce the righteous life God desires. What is the answer?

Read Galatians 5:16-26, our focal passage for this study. How can we find both freedom and righteous in Christ? (Check one)

Live however we want as long as it doesn't hurt someone else.

Follow the law as closely as possible.

Live life submitted to the Holy Spirit, following His leading.

Today we laid the foundation for our study. Next week we will dig into the meaning of “fruit of the Spirit.” In the meantime, let’s talk:

So far in your Christian life do you feel you have been influenced more by the “law,” your own nature, or by the Spirit? (We may not have the influence of the Mosaic Law, but the “do’s” and “don’ts” or religion are still prominent.)

Lesson Two

WHAT IS “FRUIT”?

When my kids were little they loved watching the *Veggie Tales* movies. Their favorite Veggie Tale characters were Bob and Larry – a tomato and cucumber, respectively. If you are also a *Veggie Tales* fan, you might want to sit down because I am about to shake things up. Larry and Bob aren’t vegetables! To be botanically correct, tomatoes and cucumbers are fruits! In fact, pumpkins and zucchini are fruit too.

The confusion over fruits and vegetables stems from the differences between scientific classification and how we use them in cooking. We tend to see “fruits” as sweet and “vegetables” as savory. In case you’re interested, here’s a definition I found at wisegeek.com.

Simply put, a fruit is the ovary of a plant, which means that it may contain seeds, while a vegetable is a plant part, which does not contain seeds.

It really doesn’t matter if we consider a tomato to be a fruit or a vegetable. But we do need a good understanding of the “fruit of the Spirit.” Over the next few weeks we will plant God’s truth about spiritual fruit in our hearts, cultivate our lives to receive it, and take action to help it grow! Today we’ll take a closer look at what the “fruit of the Spirit” *is* and what it *is not*.

Read our focal passage, Galatians 5:16-26.

The word “fruit” used in Galatians 5:22 is the Greek word “karpos.” According to *Mounces Complete Expository Dictionary*, “karpos” refers to the natural product of something that is alive. Literally, it’s used of the product of trees, vines, and crops. But it’s also used metaphorically to refer to the natural product of a spiritual being. Paul uses it to contrast what our sinful natures naturally produces with what the Holy Spirit naturally produces.

Plant: Prerequisite to Growing Spiritual Fruit

The obvious prerequisite to producing the “fruit of the Spirit” is the presence of the Spirit. Let’s see what the Bible says about the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and His work in us.

Read Romans 8:9-11. Mark the following statements as True or False:

- ___ *You can be a Christian without having the Holy Spirit.*
- ___ *If you do not have the Spirit you do not belong to Christ.*
- ___ *If you belong to Christ then you have His Spirit.*

Read Ephesians 1:13-14. Check all the statements that apply.

- ___ *We receive the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ.*
- ___ *The Holy Spirit “marks” us as belonging to God.*
- ___ *The Spirit is our “guarantee” that we will receive all God’s promises.*

When we place our faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, God guarantees our salvation by placing His Spirit within us. Every Christian is indwelled by the Holy Spirit. *(If you don’t have a saving relationship with Jesus or aren’t sure, read “How to Have a Relationship with Jesus.”)*

Cultivate: Two Key Facts about the Fruit of the Spirit

Let’s get a better understanding of the Fruit of the Spirit by exploring two key facts.

Fact #1: “Fruit” is the natural by-product of the Spirit in a Christian’s life.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 from the New Living Translation below:

⁷ For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

The Spirit has work to do in the life of a believer. According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, what is the work of the Spirit in our lives?

From the moment of salvation until the end of our lives on this earth, the Spirit of God works in believers to transform our nature and character into that of Christ’s. God’s goal for all His children is for us to be like Jesus (Romans 8:29). Therefore, the Holy Spirit is constantly working to rid our lives of the “acts of the sinful nature” (Gal 5:19) and conform us into the image of Christ. “Fruit of the Spirit” is evidence that our character is becoming like Christ’s.

Fact #2: “Fruit of the Spirit” is not the same as “spiritual gifts.”

We’ve learned that “fruit of the Spirit” is the development of Christ’s character in the life of a believer. Now let’s take a look at what this “fruit” is *not*.

Read 1 Cor 12:4-11. List the differences between “spiritual gifts” and “spiritual fruit.”

Although the Spirit is the source of both, His “gifts” and “fruit” are not the same. There are a multitude of different kinds of gifts but an individual only receives what the Holy Spirit determines to give. However the “fruit” of the Spirit should be common to all Christians. The word “karpos” is singular signifying that “fruit” is a unified whole. As we grow in Christ-likeness we will produce *all* the characteristics of His nature.

Grow: A Challenge to Know the Fruit

I want my life to increasingly produce the “Fruit of the Spirit.” How about you? As a solid reminder of what our lives should look like, will you join me in memorizing Galatians 5:22-23? Let’s do it?

Let’s talk. Will you take the Scripture memory challenge? How has today’s lesson helped you understand the “Fruit of the Spirit?” What stood out to you the most in what we discussed?

Lesson Three

THE BATTLE

I fought this particular battle many times. And I’ve watched many other moms fight it too. It happens every day in grocery checkout lines all over the world. The preschooler wants candy. The mom does not want the preschooler to have candy. And so the battle begins.

The preschoolers fight with every weapon in their arsenal - tears, pleadings, promises of good behavior, and even temper tantrums. Moms draw the line to defend healthy teeth and a nutritious diet. Who will win?

Sometimes the mom wins. Sometimes the kid wins. The outcome depends on willpower and determination. The kids have an advantage because they don't care how many people stare and whisper. They value the candy much more than their self-respect. Sometimes the battle-weary mom just wants to get out of the store alive, even if that means giving in. At least she will live to fight another day.

The candy battle in the checkout line is a minor skirmish compared to the spiritual battle going on inside every Christian. Our sinful human nature wants to satisfy our selfish desires. The indwelling Holy Spirit calls us to follow Him. Who will win?

Plant: The two sides in this spiritual battle

Read Galatians 5:16-18. Describe this spiritual battle in your own words.

Let's identify the sides in this battle. Paul says the *Spirit* wants one thing and the *sinful nature* (some translations use *flesh*) wants another. The Greek word *pneuma*, translated as "Spirit," can also be translated as "breath" or "wind." Like the wind, the Holy Spirit is an unseen but "powerful force with visible effects" (*Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary*). "Sinful nature" or "flesh" is the Greek word *sarx*. Although this word primarily referred to the physical body, Christians also used it to describe our fallen, sinful nature. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* describes this usage: "*Sarx* came to mean all the evil that man is and is capable of apart from the intervention of God's grace in his life."

Cultivate: Greater is He that is in us

Read Ephesians 1:18-21. How powerful is the Holy Spirit that lives within you? (Check all that apply.)

- Incomparably great*
- God's mighty strength*
- Powerful enough to raise the dead*
- More powerful than any earthly authority*

Unfortunately, our sinful nature still exists. But praise God, we have a weapon of unlimited power on our side. The same power that raised Christ from the dead lives inside every believer! We have the power to resist our fleshly desires through the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. “The one who is in you, is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4, NIV).

The Holy Spirit does not immunize us against temptation – rather, He enables us to withstand temptation. He imparts to us the ability to turn away from all things that are contrary to God’s plan and purpose for our lives. Charles Stanley, Living in the Power of the Holy Spirit

Read the following verses and record God’s promises to you.

2 Peter 1:3-4 –

1 Corinthians 10:13 -

Grow: Follow the Spirit

We do *not* have to give in to sin. Our fleshly nature does not have to win. Jesus’ death and resurrection broke Satan’s death grip on us. Satan can appeal to our sinful desires, but his power over us is limited. We have a greater power at work in us.

Look back at Galatians 5:16-19. We have a choice to make. What is it?

We can choose to refuse our sinful nature. The powerful presence of the Holy Spirit supplies us with the power to be obedient to God. We can choose God’s “way out.” The question is: will we succumb to the call of our flesh or will we yield to the Holy Spirit and walk in His power?

Let’s talk: Think about the last time you faced a spiritual battle. What was it? Did you allow your flesh to win or did you walk in the power of the Holy Spirit? If you gave in to sin, can you identify the “way out” God offered?

Lesson Four

THROW OUT THE BAD FRUIT

If you've had any experience with a GPS or use a navigation system for driving directions then you are familiar with the following phrases:

- Recalculating
- Make a legal u-turn as soon as possible

My anxiety level rises dramatically when I hear that little computerized voice. In layman's terms, "recalculating" means "You aren't following my directions!" And the command to make a u-turn means, "You're going the wrong way! Turn around immediately and go the other way!"

Plant: What does fleshly fruit look like?

Like these GPS warnings to drivers, there are certain things that should raise a red flag in our faith if they are present in our lives. In Galatians, Paul refers to these signs as "acts of the sinful nature." These attitudes and behaviors are contrary to the Spirit and what He wants to produce in our lives.

Read Galatians 5:19-21 from the New Living Translation below.

¹⁹ When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21, NLT

Grow: Is our life growing any fruit of the flesh?

Circle any fruit of the sinful nature in the passage above that sometimes pop up in your life.

This list in Galatians is not exhaustive. Paul merely gave the believers in Galatia a sample of the fruit of the flesh. And everyone will struggle with different things. Let's read two more passages from Paul's letters to broaden our understanding of "the acts of the sinful nature."

Read the following passages (maybe in more than one translation) and list any attitudes or behaviors that your sinful nature tends to produce.

Ephesians 4:22-32 and 5:1-7:

Colossians 3:5-10:

The presence of these attitudes and behaviors reveal that sometimes we allow our sinful nature to win a spiritual battle. If you're like most Christians – including me – your life does produce some fleshly fruit from time to time. We still occasionally choose our own way over God's and reject the "way out" He promises to provide when we're tempted (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Plant: What can we do to get rid of the bad fruit?

Believer, whether our lives have produced a handful of fleshly fruit or an abundant crop, God's desire for us is less "acts of the sinful nature" and more "fruit of the Spirit." In the remainder of this lesson we are going to prepare our lives for the Spirit's harvest by weeding out the bad fruit and tilling our heart for the Spirit's work.

Read James 4:1-10.

Jesus' brother James wrote to Christians caught in a cycle of sin. They had proudly rejected the leadership of the Spirit and chosen their own way. Distance from God, difficult relationships with God's people, and a harvest of fleshly fruit were the result. But James commanded a remedy. I can hear him saying, "Make a legal u-turn as soon as possible!"

List phrases and words (vs 1-4) that describe their relationship with God and other believers.

Look back through verses 6-10 and list all the verbs you can spot that describe the actions a Christian should take when we've chosen our own way over God's (I spotted 10).

These actions characterize true repentance. Sometimes Christians merely give lip service to repentance. But until we humble ourselves before God, grieve over our sin, and turn away from it we have not experienced real repentance. We must make a u-turn!

Read 1 John 1:9. How does God promise to respond to our repentance?

Today's lesson has been very personal – and maybe even painful. We all have bad fruit in our lives. But, praise God, He does indeed allow u-turns! Take some time this week to sit quietly with God and work through getting rid of the fleshly fruit. In the meantime, let's talk more about the process of repentance:

Was there anything in James 4:6-10 about repentance that surprised you? Maybe an attitude God calls us to adopt or an action you previously have not considered part of repentance.

Lesson Five

THE WALKING DEAD

I know what you're thinking. Images of horror movies and the undead have probably crept into your mind. Just for fun, I Googled "The Walking Dead," the title of today's lesson. Did you know there's a TV series with the same name? This drama on AMC tells the story of a post-apocalyptic world ravaged by a zombie epidemic.

Thankfully, our fifth lesson in the "Fruit of the Spirit" has nothing to do with zombies. But we do need to talk about death – our own, in fact.

Here's the truth of it: **We** cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit. We cannot – with any consistency – live a life characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control.

You may be able to muster up a loving act now and again. I might work up enough will-power to control my fleshly desires in one instance today. But our lives will never abundantly exhibit the

characteristics of Christ by our own strength and works. In today's lesson we will explore how a life full of the Spirit's fruit is possible.

Read Galatians 5:22-25. Are we told to produce the Fruit of the Spirit? (Circle one) Yes No

In lesson two, "What is Fruit?" we learned that "fruit" is the natural by-product of the Holy Spirit. Only the Spirit can produce these characteristics in our lives. As we allow Him to take control, His life will be manifested in ours.

Identify two things in the passage we should be doing.

Paul used the "active" voice in verse 24 when he wrote "have crucified the sinful nature." This signifies an act that a believer has done and must continue to do to herself.

What do you think "crucifying our sinful nature" looks like in everyday life?

Remember this is something we can do. We can choose to turn away from our sinful desires. Because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, we have the power to resist temptation and choose the way out God provides (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Before we take a closer look at the second thing we should be doing, read Romans 8:11-14. According to this passage, what "obligation" do we have as believers? Check all that apply.

To follow our sinful nature and submit to its desires

To turn away from the deeds of our sinful nature

To submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit

According to Romans 8:11, why do we have this obligation?

Paul reinforces this reasoning in Galatians 5:25. Since the Holy Spirit has given new life to our sin-dead souls, we are obligated to follow His lead. This is the second thing we should be doing. Depending on your translation, you may read "keep in step with," "follow the Spirit's leading," or "let us walk by." Here's how *Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionary* defines the Greek word *stoicheo*, that is translated in these various ways:

- 1) To proceed in a row as the march of a soldier, go in order; metaph. to go on prosperously, to turn out well
- 2) To walk; to direct one's life, to live

Considering the definition of “walk,” what does it mean to “walk by” or “keep in step with” the Spirit?

Read Galatians 2:20 below from the New Living Translation:

My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

How does this verse help us understand what it means to “walk by the Spirit.”

On my own, I would produce nothing but sinful works. Even my “good fruit” would be rotten. My flesh is too weak and sinful and to produce the characteristics of Christ. Kathy must “die.” I have to get out of the way and let the Holy Spirit live Christ’s life through me. It’s the appropriate response to the One who saved my life. And my eternal hope.

Let’s talk: What is the hardest thing for you about following the Spirit? What helps you submit to His leadership?

Lesson Six

BEAUTIFUL, BOUNTIFUL HARVEST

When we began this study, I mentioned my lemon tree. How it budded and bloomed. How the little lemons began to grow. Six weeks later the lemons aren’t ready to harvest. The fruit is still growing; the lemons still green. Fruit production takes time. But I *will* drink lemonade!

Like physical fruit needs time to grow, the fruit of the Spirit will not ripen in our lives overnight. We must work consistently to crucify the old nature. We must continually refuse to give in to our fleshly desires and yield our will to the Spirit’s. We *can* say “no” to our sinful nature, accept the “way out” God provides, and follow the Holy Spirit’s leading.

As we grow, the characteristics of Christ – fruit of the Spirit – will be manifested in our lives. As the Spirit transforms us more and more into the image of Christ, we will produce a beautiful, bountiful fruit harvest!

Plant: Knowing the Fruit

In Week Two, we discussed the meaning of “fruit.” The Greek word “karpos” refers to the natural product of the Holy Spirit, who lives inside every believer. The word is singular, signifying that “fruit” is a unified whole. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* suggests we think of the fruit as a “bunch of grapes instead of separate pieces of fruit.” As we grow in Christ-likeness we will produce *all* the characteristics of His nature.

If you memorized Galatians 5:22-23, then you know the 9 characteristics of the Spirit’s fruit. List them below. If you didn’t memorize the passage, read it now, then list them.

Let’s consider the meaning of each characteristic. Place the letter of a definition in the blank before the correct characteristic. (To double-check, the answer key is at the end of the lesson!)

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ___ 1. Love | a. Putting up with circumstances and other people, even when severely tried; endurance, longsuffering, and perseverance |
| ___ 2. Joy | b. Related closely to “kindness”; generosity that springs from kindness; could include “sterner” acts of doing good |
| ___ 3. Peace | c. The attitude that deliberately expresses itself in loving ways and seeks the welfare of others; it’s dependent on the giver’s character, not emotion |
| ___ 4. Patience | d. Reliability or trustworthiness; also describes someone willing to die for their confession of Christ |
| ___ 5. Kindness | e. Strength to control our sinful desires, to say “no” to the flesh |
| ___ 6. Goodness | f. Corresponds to “happiness” in the secular world but does not depend on our physical circumstances |
| ___ 7. Faithfulness | g. Acting in a good and gentle way toward another |
| ___ 8. Gentleness/Meekness | h. State of tranquility; harmonious relations between people and with God; sense of rest and contentment |
| ___ 9. Self-Control | i. Closely linked to humility; grace of the soul; not weakness; opposite of self-assertive and self-interest |

Cultivate: Find out More

Let's take a quick look at an example of each characteristic in action. Read the following Scripture passages. Make observations on the operation of these characteristics.

Galatians 5:13-14 (love):

John 16:22 (joy):

Romans 5:1 (peace):

2 Timothy 4:2 (patience):

Titus 3:4 (kindness):

Romans 15:14 (goodness):

2 Thessalonians 1:4 (faithfulness/faith):

2 Timothy 2:24-25 (gentleness/gentle):

2 Peter 1:5-6 (self-control):

Grow: Ready for a Harvest

We've talked facts and definitions. Now, let's get personal. It's time to do a fruit check. This is between each of us and God. Spend some quiet time with Him now and reflect on each characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit.

Ask God to show you the quality of the Spirit's fruit in your life. Think about some recent circumstances. In the space below, jot down times you feel the Spirit's character was manifested and times you allowed your natural, sinful character to take over.

Although we will battle our fleshly nature for the rest of our lives, we become more sensitive to the Spirit's leading as we mature and learn to recognize His voice. As we end our study together, I pray God will encourage, strengthen, and grow you in the days ahead!

Let's talk: What did you learn in this study that has encouraged or challenged you the most?

Fruit of the Spirit definition answer key. 1c, 2f, 3h, 4a, 5g, 6b, 7d, 8i, 9e