



NG Study Guide: Galatians 5:16-26 “How to Grow Part 2” (5.15.22)

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: Every human was designed for spiritual growth. In the Garden of Eden, God established a model where Adam and Eve could walk with God and learn from Him as they grew. Jesus Himself modeled spiritual growth in His humanity (c.f. Luke 2:40). Our desire for self-improvement through self-discipline is a fragmented picture of God’s original intention of spiritual growth through the power of the Spirit. True transformation that leads to contentment comes only through the Holy Spirit working in our lives. Today we will continue to unpack how we can experience the joy of growing in our faith.

Context: The book of Galatians was written by the apostle Paul after his first missionary journey. Upon hearing that the church he planted in Galatia had fallen into error - specifically the teachings of the Judaizers - Paul writes this letter to help correct and encourage. Galatians 5 finds the space in the tension between legalism and apathy. While Paul combated the notion that one needed to work for salvation, he emphasized the need for growth as a result of our salvation.

A. Cultivating a Healthy Space for Growth [16-21]

1. The conflict between the flesh and the Spirit [16-18]

¹⁶I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

When we place our faith in Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit that begins to reveal the lusts of our flesh. Within each of us lies a tension between our sinful desires and the inner working of the Spirit to transform us more into the image of Jesus as both fight to be the object of our affection. The Spirit leads us towards the things of God while the flesh pulls us away (c.f. Romans 8:5). Left alone, the lusts of the flesh grow into spiritual weeds that choke out growth. But there is hope, for Jesus promises victory over the flesh [18].

2. Eliminating spiritual weeds [19-21, 24]

¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

If we want to grow in our faith, we must cultivate a healthy space for growth. This process begins with removing the “spiritual weeds” (traits that contradict the character of Christ) from our lives.

How do we eliminate spiritual weeds?

i. Recognize what spiritual weeds are: Spiritual weeds aren’t simply things we don’t like about ourselves (eg. Physical fitness, appearance, lack of education, etc.) Spiritual weeds are the traits that are contrary to the characteristics of Christ. Here, Paul gives a list of just some of the spiritual weeds we should be aware of in our lives:

ii. Repent: To repent of something is to “turn away from”. Repentance of our sin is an attitude of the heart reflected in the actions we take. As the Spirit convicts us, we should identify sin and turn from it (both in desire and deed). A lack of repentance (and consequently growth) may indicate that a person is not saved (21).

ii. Resist temptation: Growth is a process, and temptation is going to be inevitable. In placing our faith in Jesus, we can have confidence in the power of God in our lives to help us overcome (1 Cor. 10:13). The enemy of our souls, the world, and our flesh present a variety of distractions from pursuing God. In James 4, the disciple writes, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” When we resist temptation, the enemy sees the Spirit of God at work in our lives and flees.

iii. Run from evil: While temptation is inevitable, the worst thing we can do is see temptation, resist it, but remain in that situation. When we see evil in our lives, we must actively run from it and run towards God. In 2 Timothy 2:22, the apostle Paul tells Timothy to “...flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness....” Joseph sets this example with Potiphar’s wife. Though he had consistently resisted temptation, he recognized the danger of staying around and chose to run from evil.

iv. Relate to Christ in death: In verse 24, Paul says “*And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*” Our new life in Christ was purchased with His death. He didn’t die to put our sins at bay. He died to put our sins to death. Without the death of Christ, our sins would still have power over us. Spiritual weeds can only be removed at the root when we identify with Christ in His death - looking to Him as our Savior and Redeemer.

B. Walk in the Spirit and Grow [22-23, 25-26]]

i. Know how to identify spiritual fruit [22-23]

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Notice that Paul doesn’t list gifts, skills, or talents. Growing fruit is primarily concerned with character development. If we fall into the trap of thinking we have to *do more* in order to *become more*, we’re going to grind ourselves down. We can “do” all the Christian things and look the part while never be any closer to being like Jesus in the depths of our soul. Being made into the image of Jesus isn’t only about what we do; it is about who we are becoming.

ii. Focus on your relationship with the Spirit [25]

²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit isn’t simply a force or an energy. The Spirit is a person just as much God the Father and God the Son, and should be viewed as such. When Paul talks about walking in the Spirit, it’s a relational term. To walk *in* the Spirit is to walk *with* the Spirit. If we don’t have a relationship with Him it makes it impossible to walk with Him. If we want to grow in our faith, we must invest in our relationship with Him.

iii. Develop spiritual disciplines

As we seek to follow Jesus and hope to be transformed into His image, it is the Spirit that points us in the right direction. One of the ways He does this is through spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are areas that the Spirit uses to facilitate growth. Here are five spiritual disciplines (among many) that we can begin developing regularly in our lives:

1. Bible Reading: The Bible is God's true word. As the Spirit leads us into all truth (Jn 16:13), He does this through interpreting God's word for us.

2. Praying: Pray is a time to communicate to God as we learn to depend on Him. The goal of prayer is to align our hearts and will with God's.

3. Fasting: Removing food from our lives for a temporary time period allows us to reflect on our spiritual needs above our physical needs. Just as we need food to nourish our bodies, the Spirit reminds us of our need to nourish our souls.

4. Sabbath: As we cultivate our lives to grow, we need time to rest. Sabbath allows us time to enjoy the presence of God and reflect on the work He is doing in and through us (c.f. Gen. 2:1-3).

5. Serving: When we serve others, it is both for our benefit and the benefit of those we serve. The giving of our time, talents, and treasures blesses others and gives us space to see how the fruit of the Spirit (characteristics of Christ) reveal themselves in tangible ways as we grow.

iv. Rejoice in how God grows you through each season [26]

At first read, it may seem like Paul takes an abrupt turn in the topic. But this idea fits extremely well into the flow of his point. As we experience spiritual growth, we need to remember that comparison kills our focus on God's growth plan for our lives. When we compare ourselves to others, we have the tendency of falling into pride (thinking of ourselves as better than others) or falling into envy (wishing we were more like others). Rejoice in the ways that God is growing you and find contentment in His plan for you.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. What are some dangers of leaving "spiritual weeds" unattended?

Q2. What are some ways we can cultivate space for spiritual growth?

Q3. Where have you seen the fruit of walking in the Spirit in your life?

Q4. How do you hope to grow in your faith in this next season of life?

"Disciples Who Dig Deeper" (optional or alternative study)

1. This article takes a closer look into each of the fruit of the Spirit: <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/holy-spirit/what-are-the-fruits-of-the-spirit.html>

2. This podcast episode from the Bible Project digs into the Spirit and the fruit He grows in our lives: <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/i-am-who-i-am-part-6-spirit-and-fruit/>

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?

2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?

2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:

As you engage with your neighbors where you live, work, study, play, and worship, consider ways that you can demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit. The way we live out our faith helps us set an example for others to grow in their love for God and neighbors.

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
- 3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.