



WEEK OF AUGUST 29, 2021

**LESSON AIM:** **Choose to center  
your life on, and be  
guided by, the Spirit.**

**UNIT:** Galatians

**THEME:** Choose

**LESSON TEXT:** Galatians 5:16-26; 6:7-10

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Galatians 6:1-6; Romans 8:5-13; 13:11-14;  
Ephesians 2:1-5; 1 John 2:15-17

## WHICH DESIRES?

BY MARK SCOTT

Desires are primal. Brain research—a quite recent medical focus—finds that our “first brain” (sounds evolutionary, doesn’t it?) functions at a deeper level than cognition. Volition is at the real guts of the human experience. Maybe this is why when the serpent tempted Eve, he did so at the level of her desires (Genesis 3:6; cf. 1 John 2:16).

Paul wrote at the level of our desires when he shared the practical application of living by faith in Christ as opposed to living by works of the law. Desires shape much of our lives. But what shapes those desires?

**The Flesh***Galatians 5:16-21*

When believers *walk* (live by or tread about) by the Spirit, they ensure that the flesh will not dictate their desires. Those walking by the Spirit will not *gratify the desires of the flesh*. Desires is a word that got dirtier in its etymology. It started out well (cf. Luke 22:15), but it became synonymous with evil. *Flesh* can simply mean “human.” But in this passage, it means “opposed to God.”

The flesh, which becomes the threshold for sin (Romans 7:14-20), is at war with the Holy Spirit. *Flesh* is mentioned seven times in our lesson text, while *Spirit* is mentioned nine times. So, which is stronger (Mark 14:36; 1 John 4:4)? People who do not have the internal help of the Holy Spirit need external laws to make them good.

Paul mentioned 15 *acts (works) of the flesh*. (The biblical vice lists are most often longer than the virtue lists. Could it be that living from the inside out by the Spirit needs only a few guidelines whereas living by rules requires greater specificity to know what God desires?) The acts of the flesh can be divided into four categories. The first three deal with sex. The next four deal with religion. The next six deal with various societal sins, and the final two deal with alcohol. We were born in the flesh, but we do not have to live by the earthy desires that drive that flesh.

**The Spirit***Galatians 5:22-26*

The contrast between living externally and living internally could not be clearer. The Spirit produces *fruit* (singular) as opposed to the flesh which produces acts. John R.W. Stott recited these nine fruit every morning in his devotional time because he believed

that these nine fruit summarize the life of Christ better than any other list. They could be viewed as three groups of three—love, joy, peace; forbearance, kindness, goodness; faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. In Jewish lists, things that head the list and end the list seem to get the accent. Love is our finest apologetic, and self-control helps us keep our head in a world gone nuts.

These nine fruit need no law. When they are produced in believers who live out the cruciform life, no law is necessary. Paul harkened back to Galatians 2:20 and spoke again about being *crucified* with Christ. When we live in Christ, by Christ, and for Christ, it is as if our desires and passions were crucified the day Jesus died. It was like a co-crucifixion. When believers abide in Christ, fruit is produced naturally—even if we need to be pruned occasionally (John 15:2).

When we *live* (the verb is indicative of the best life, i.e., life lived at the highest level) *by the Spirit*, we will *keep in step* (to go in rank or walk orderly) *with the Spirit*. Of course, this will keep us from becoming conceited, and provoking others, and envying still others.

**The Harvest***Galatians 6:7-10*

The flesh can drive our desires, and the Spirit can drive our desires. But an additional aspect that can shape our desires is the law of harvest. The future is a powerful shaper of our desires. Knowing that there is such a thing as “payday someday” can keep us internally motivated.

Before discussing the law of harvest, Paul called believers to help fellow Christians who are overtaken with sin, to bear burdens, to be willing to be tested in their faith, and to share financially with spiritual directors. God cannot be *mocked* (to snort or clear away mucus). The law of harvest has been in place since creation (Genesis 1:11-13).

People reap what they sow. If they sow to fleshly desires, they will reap *destruction* (spoiling). If they sow to *please the Spirit*, they will reap eternal life. If believers do not *become weary* (lose their courage) *in doing good*, they will reap a harvest of goodness. Finally, Paul called believers to *do good* to everyone, especially to the church. Desires are shaped by the flesh, the Spirit, and the future. ■

## APPLICATION

### SHE THOUGHT HE WAS A GARDENER

BY DAVID FAUST

How much sorrow must a person endure? How could she withstand another crashing wave of disappointment?

Mary Magdalene had been down the road of despair before, confused and tormented by the devil. Then she met Jesus, who freed her from Satan's power and gave her hope. But then came that dark afternoon when soldiers nailed Jesus to a cross. For Mary and all the other disciples who loved him so dearly, hope drained to the ground along with his blood.

Overwhelmed by grief, Mary wanted to see his body one more time and anoint it with spices in a final gesture of appreciation. When she and two other women arrived at the tomb early in the morning, their broken hearts endured yet another blow. The stone had been removed from the front of the tomb. Jesus' body was gone.

Bitterly disappointed because she couldn't anoint the body of her beloved Lord, Mary burst into tears near the empty tomb, barely noticing the man standing behind her. He asked, "'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him'" (John 20:15).

It was Jesus, who had risen from the dead! Mary was standing in the presence of the living Lord, but she didn't realize it. Actually, her mistake is understandable. Her eyes were filled with tears, and early morning fog may have lingered in the still-dark garden. Mary's whiplashed emotions made it difficult for her mind to grasp history's greatest miracle. In your own life, have there been times when the Lord was right there with you, but you didn't recognize his presence?

#### A Place Where Things Grow

The Bible says, "At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid" (John 19:41). It's interesting that Jesus was buried in a place where things grow. On the farm where I grew up, our garden was an integral part of our family's food supply. We canned and froze tomatoes, corn, green beans, and other fruit and vegetables. In my travels I have seen artfully landscaped gardens in England, Austria, New Zealand, and Japan filled with beautiful flowers, shrubs, and trees. Solomon built palatial gardens and parks where fruit trees were watered by reservoirs (Ecclesiastes 2:5-6). God seems to have a special place in his heart for gardens. At the beginning of human history, he walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Jesus poured out heartfelt prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane. The book of Revelation pictures a crystal-clear river and a tree that continually bears fruit in the paradise God is preparing for the faithful.

When Jesus called Mary's name, she recognized him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). At first, she mistook him for a gardener, and in a way, she wasn't wrong.

Jesus skillfully trims and prunes his followers so they will bear more fruit (John 15:1-8). He is a wise teacher who wants his students to produce a harvest of "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

**Personal Challenge:** When you read the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23, which fruit seems most abundant in your life right now? Which fruit do you lack? ■

## DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How did it go when you shared a verse from last week's study with someone who is living according to a law-keeping system to try to find favor with God?
2. What circumstances did you face as you went through the past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Galatians 5:16-26 and 6:7-10** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions (one of which could be a paraphrase such as *The Message*). Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. What contrasts do you see in these passages?
4. Let's dig deeper:
  - What warnings does Paul give in these passages?
  - What promises do you see?
  - Look specifically at the contrasts between the "acts of the flesh" and the "fruit of the Spirit." Before even considering the acts and fruit themselves, what do those headings demonstrate to you about living as a follower of Christ?
  - What does Paul's choice of the word *fruit* teach you about how love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are produced in our lives?
  - How should Christ followers deal with sinful desires and passions?
  - How does Galatians 5:16-25 help someone carry out the instructions of 5:26 and 6:7?
  - What do you learn about God's timing versus human timing from these passages?
5. What do you learn about God's Spirit from these passages?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. Choose a command from these passages to obey and then share specifically how you will seek to obey it this week?
  - Keep on walking by the Spirit.
  - Be willingly led by the Spirit.
  - Crucify the flesh with its passions and desires.
  - Keep in step with the Spirit.
  - Sow to please the Spirit.
  - Do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers.
8. When we care for fellow believers in our community of faith, we become stronger and then together we can share God's love with a needy world. What good thing will you do for another Christ follower this week so that they may not become weary in doing good and so that we as a community of Christ can reap a harvest?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . . ?"
10. What opportunities to do good to others do you anticipate this week?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Hebrews 1:1—2:4** as we begin a new unit on the book of Hebrews and the theme, "Superior." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■