

Living *by the*
Spirit

Living *by the* **Spirit**

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REGULAR BAPTIST PRESS
1300 North Meacham Road
Schaumburg, Illinois 60173-4806

This study guide is
designed to be used with
Blueprint for Spiritual Maturity,
a series of discipleship training materials
from Regular Baptist Press.
Visit the Web site for further details.
www.RegularBaptistPress.org/buildup

LIVING BY THE SPIRIT

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www.RegularBaptistPress.org • 1-800-727-4440

RBP5375 • ISBN: 978-1-59402-660-7

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Introduction

I planted three apple trees in my back yard a few years ago. Each tree had a label that told me what kind of tree it was. Each label showed a picture of the tree and its fruit. Season after season I have carefully watered, pruned, and sprayed these trees. I can hardly wait to reap the fruit of my labors!

But what if, at harvest time, I would discover something other than apples growing on those trees—something disgusting or inedible? That would certainly be disappointing! After all, I expect to pick beautiful, crisp, delicious apples from the branches of my trees.

Just as my trees are to be true to their fruit-bearing nature, born-again Christians are to be true to our new, spiritual nature by bearing spiritual fruit. Our fruit (the actions and attitudes that exemplify who we are) should match our label: CHILDREN OF GOD. The picture on our label is clearly displayed in Scripture: the image of Jesus Christ.

Bearing spiritual fruit is the result of God instructing us through His Word and of the Holy Spirit empowering our lives for Biblical change. Yielding to His working will bring forth the wonderful fruits of righteousness and virtue. Every believer's life purpose is to "glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). Bearing Christ's image not only on our "label" but also in our lives glorifies our precious Redeemer. This is truly "living by the Spirit." Isn't that what every believer should desire?

Before you begin this important life study, would you bow your heart before the Lord? Ask Him to produce His

fruit in your life so that you may glorify Him in your body and spirit. Study through these lessons with your Bible open and a pen in hand. You'll notice a Bible verse at the start of each chapter. Take time to memorize each one. Hiding God's Word in your heart is always a wise investment. Consider asking a friend to take the journey with you.

Ask God to work in unmistakable ways to bring opportunities and His appointments to you. Pray earnestly and watch what the Lord will do as you begin *Living by the Spirit*.



Lesson 1

The Struggle Within

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

—*Galatians 5:22, 23*

Have you ever participated in a tug-of-war? I am sure that you could recount some interesting personal stories concerning your great feats of strength and skill from a Sunday School picnic, a youth event, or just some informal, friendly get-together. Having a mud pit in the middle makes things a bit more challenging and interesting. You might have experienced some quick, lopsided wins (or losses). Most of the time, however, these matches of strength and strategy are struggles that move first one way and then the other until, bit by agonizing bit, one team experiences victory and the other collapses in defeat (maybe even covered in mud).

The struggle to live the Christian life could be described as a spiritual tug-of-war. The “good” in us and the “bad” in us battle

to control the will in us. Think for a moment about the spiritual struggles that occur between these forces in your life. Which side usually wins and which side usually ends up in the mud pit? Why does one side win over the other in your life?

Galatians 5:16–26 describes the warfare that exists in our lives as we struggle to please the Lord. We will take time to study this portion of Scripture closely in this lesson. This passage is also central in understanding the fruit of the Spirit. As His blood-bought children, we are blessed that God has made provision for us to stay out of the spiritual mud pits and to live victorious and fruitful lives!

The Struggle Every Believer Faces

Our prone-to-sin fleshly nature had the primary control over us prior to our salvation. Although Christ has set believers free from sin's control (Romans 8:2) and has made us new (2 Corinthians 5:17), our fleshly desires were not eradicated at salvation. They are still present in us, engaging us in a lifelong tug-of-war. If we want to experience victory in this struggle, we must be careful what or whom we yield to (cf. Romans 6:16, 19).

1. Read Galatians 5:16–18.
 - (a) What should be the goal of every believer according to verse 16?

(b) How is our spiritual struggle described in verse 17?

(c) Who is supposed to have the leadership and control in our lives (v. 18)?

2. Read Romans 7:15–23. Summarize the apostle Paul’s struggle.

3. Read Romans 7:24 and 25. How did Paul gain the victory?

The Battle from the Flesh

The flesh lusts for—sets its desires upon—things that will please or satisfy our bodies, our emotions, our wants. When we were still unsaved, without Christ, those desires were what we yielded to that produced the works of the flesh in our lives.

4. Look over the list of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19–21. What does verse 21 tell us concerning those who do [habitually practice] such things?

5. Read Romans 13:14. What command did the apostle Paul give in regard to our flesh? Explain what this command means.

The Influence of the Holy Spirit

We were the children of disobedience who allowed the spirit of the prince of the power of the air, Satan, to control us (Ephesians 2:2). But Christ has redeemed us through His blood sacrifice. We have been saved! We are no longer under the control of Satan. Now the Holy Spirit wants to be the motivator for our actions. He wants us to conduct our daily lives by allowing Him to be in control, rather than succumbing to the sinful desires that used to have power over us. Since we belong to Christ, we must declare to our flesh, “No more! Spirit of God, control me!”

6. Read Galatians 5:22 and 23.
 - (a) What is the source of this fruit?

- (b) Why is fruit a good term to describe these characteristics?

The “fruit of the Spirit” is the result of our yielding to the Spirit of God as He reveals to us the will of God through the Word of God. Yielding to the Holy Spirit produces the wonderful fruit of righteousness, holiness, and virtue and allows the believer to grow in likeness to Jesus Christ. His likeness is evident in the life of someone who has been saved and transformed by God’s marvelous grace.

How to Win the Struggle

Galatians 5:24 says we are to crucify, or put to death, the flesh (ungodly desires) by not yielding to its allurements. When we crucify the flesh, we separate ourselves from its desires. This separation results in our not yielding to the pull and attraction of sin. Though the struggle is difficult, we can gain the victory, as evidenced in Scripture.

7. Read Galatians 2:20. How does a person’s life change when he trusts Christ?

8. Read Romans 6:13. How is victory achieved?

What the Bible calls “the fruit of the Spirit” is the result of our yielding to the Spirit of God as He reveals to us the will of God through the Word of God.

Galatians 5:25 says believers are to “walk in the Spirit,” to live with a conduct that glorifies the Lord (Galatians 5:16). Our walk in the Spirit is actually determined by being “filled with the Spirit.” In Ephesians 5:18 God gives us a striking picture of what it means to be filled with the Spirit by comparing the Christian’s relationship to the Spirit of God with the life of someone controlled by drink.

9. Read Ephesians 5:18.

- (a) From your practical knowledge, what does wine (alcohol) do to a person who is drunk?

- (b) What things are under the influence of alcohol when someone is drunk?

- (c) How does picturing the effects of wine help you grasp the idea of being under the control of—or “filled with”—the Spirit of God?

- (d) What things in our lives will be under the influence of the Holy Spirit when we are filled with the Spirit?

Being drunk with wine is described as excess, meaning living in unsavedness.

The truth literally explodes from this contrast concerning how a child of God can live in the Spirit by being Spirit-filled. An intoxicant controls those who are under its influence. Even more so, those “filled with the Spirit” are controlled by the Holy Spirit. We are walking in the Spirit when we yield to what God reveals to us in Scripture.

Ephesians 5:18 pictures what a walk with God entails. Being filled with the Spirit is not an option for the believer but a command. The implication of this passage is that the believer continues to be filled again and again as he yields to the Holy Spirit’s influence and control, moment by moment and situation by situation. If we want the fruit of the Spirit to develop in our lives, we must continually yield to the Holy Spirit’s control.

Wrap It Up

Do you struggle to crucify the desires of the flesh and to walk in the Spirit instead? Of course you do! The spiritual tug-of-war between the Holy Spirit and the lusts of the flesh will only be over when we reach our home in Heaven. Every true believer wrestles in this lifelong spiritual conflict. Meditate on this truth: as you rely upon the empowering of the Holy Spirit and obey the teaching of Scripture, you *will* experience daily victories.

Read Galatians 5:16 again. Isn’t the promise that comes with this directive absolutely reassuring? Our wonderful and gracious God

“Walking in the Spirit” means living with a conduct that glorifies the Lord.

