

*What is in view*

Sometimes, when we talk about living the “Spirit-led” or “Spirit-filled” life, we can end up focusing on our own personal experience with the Spirit. That is not entirely wrong; clearly each believer is designed to engage relationally with the Spirit of God. But as Paul develops his thinking about the Spirit-led life in Galatians, it is quite clear that, for him, the community and relationship dimensions come to the forefront. Life in the Spirit is definitely to be experienced in community.

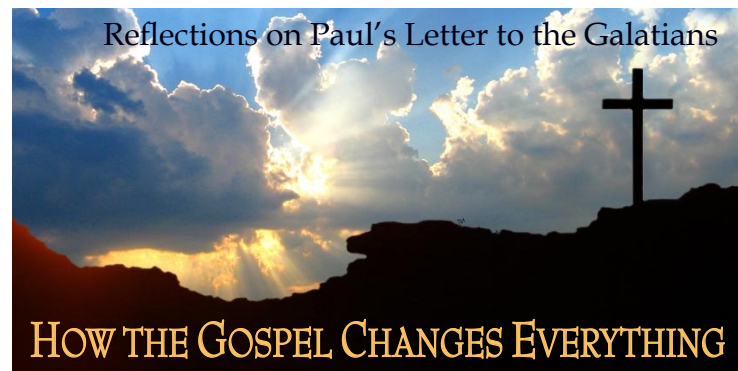
*What is helpful to note*

It is relatively easy, when attention is turned to the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23), to think of this fruit as what I personally experience in my own life. But it may be that there is much more to it than that.

Although some of the things that Paul has on his “fruit list” could be individually (and internally) experienced, there are some that would appear to be clearly “others” focused.

Although one might think of “love” in the sense of *feeling loved* by God, in the context of Galatians it is more likely that Paul has in mind the kind of mutual *loving of others* that he has just referred to in 5:13-14. There were at least two words available to Paul to speak about “patience;” he uses the one that tends to focus on *patience with others* (as opposed to enduring difficult circumstances). And what about things like kindness and goodness? Clearly they way such virtues are best experienced in life would be in relating to and living with others. So, although there is some “inside me” kind of experience of the fruit of the Spirit, much of Paul’s language lends itself to seeing this fruit as being manifest for the sake of others.

*“The Holy Spirit does not produce [His] fruit for our private enjoyment. True spirituality is not an individualistic quest for self-fulfillment—the kind of thing one has to climb to the top of a pillar by oneself to discover. The life of the Spirit flourishes for the sake of others.”*  
Philip  
Graham  
Ryken



As Paul presses on to invite the Galatians (and us!) to keep in step with the Spirit who has given us life (5:25), he seems to easily move into talking about that with respect to our relationships with one another.

To keep in step with the Spirit results in such things as:

Not provoking one another, not envying one another.  
Restoring one another, when anyone has stumbled in sin.  
Bearing burdens for one another.

And there is no way to live this way “in the flesh” (that is, merely relying on human effort and rules to manage interpersonal relations). The best a “flesh approach” can pull off is to create an environment where people end up comparing themselves to one another (5:26) with all the resulting strife, dissension, division, and trouble (5:19-21).

It might initially seem that the kind of community life that Paul is describing is the result of getting a group of “perfect” people together. But, notice, 6:1. Apparently, Paul could envision a group of people who were given over to walking by the Spirit and longing for the fruit of the Spirit to be manifest in their lives and in their midst who recognized that one of their own could stumble in sin. It wasn’t someone outside of the community that Paul was calling to have restored; this is one of those who is spiritually alive who yet stumbles in sin. So, this is not a description of a group of people who have, in some sense, “arrived.” It is an invitation to become a group of people who are given over to the kind of life the Spirit produces . . . over time . . . in us.

*Talking to your group*

When you begin with the opening questions, keep in mind that the goal is not to “rag on” the church. We do want to highlight the broad (and, at times, negative) impression that people can have of “church.” But don’t let it degenerate to a “gripe session.”

With such concerns as background, the picture that Paul paints of a Spirit-led community is wonderful and refreshing. The kind of life pictured here doesn’t happen “by accident.” But it also doesn’t happen “by effort.” When a group of people who have come into new life by grace through faith begin living in dependence on the Spirit, His “fruit” begins to develop in their lives and, the result of the fruitfulness is a community of grace living out the purpose and personality of Jesus in their world.

*“The power of the Spirit manifest in the life of the believer is not an occasional thing, manifesting itself now and then in times of special need. The believer’s whole way of life is dominated by the divine Spirit.”*  
Leon Morris

## Questions for Reflection and for Group Discussion

## Thinking . . .

Why do you think many of those who don't yet have a relationship with Jesus never darken the door of a local church? What keeps them away?

Why do you think that some of those who do have a relationship with Jesus never really end up building deep relationships with other believers? What hinders connecting?

## Reflecting . . .

Paul seems to picture a different kind of community than many encounter when they "go to church." As you read Galatians 5:22-6:5, don't focus so much on your own "personal spiritual life," but pay attention to what Paul is saying about our life together.

What would it be like to be connected to others in a community like the one Paul pictures here?

What does Paul suggest is essential to this kind of life?

What part do "restoring the fallen" and "bearing the burdens of others" play in how the Spirit-filled life is to be lived out?

## Responding . . .

Are you experiencing the kind of community life that Paul pictures here? If not, what is missing?

Rather than focusing on what others, in community, aren't doing for you, look to your own life. How could you step more fully into the kind of Spirit-led life Paul describes here?

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Reflections on Paul's Letter to the Galatians



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