

The Discipleship Project-Summer 2021

Series 2: Standing in Liberty

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Walking in the Spirit

Series Big Idea

Because in the flesh no one can live up to the high standard of Old Testament law, we must stand in the liberty and grace of the gospel.

Lesson Big Idea

Because in the flesh no one can live up to the high standard of Old Testament law, we must purpose to walk and live in the Spirit.

FOUNDATION

Scripture Focus: Galatians 5:6 (PPT)

The letter to the Galatians emanates a passion from Paul that is often interpreted as anger. There was reason for this:

The Judaizers had infiltrated the Galatian church, bringing about confusion concerning the requirements of the Law, specifically regarding circumcision, thus placing people back under bondage. As one of the primary founders of the church at Galatia, Paul expressed great concern about what had occurred in his absence.

So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law. Listen! I, Paul, tell you this: If you are counting on circumcision to make you right with God, then Christ will be of no benefit to you. I'll say it again. If you are trying to find favor with God by being circumcised, you must obey every regulation in the whole law of Moses. For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God's grace. But we who live by the Spirit eagerly wait to receive by faith the righteousness God has promised to us. For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, there is no benefit in being circumcised or being uncircumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love. You were running the race so well. Who has held you back from following the truth? It certainly isn't God, for he is the one who called you to freedom. This false teaching is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough! I am trusting the Lord to keep you from believing false teachings. God will judge that person, whoever he is, who has been confusing you. (Galatians 5:1-10, NLT)

Paul realized there could be room for misunderstanding about freedom, so he also addressed the important truth that freedom comes with responsibility.

For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another. (Galatians 5:13-15, NLT)

FRAME

Paul declared the freedom Christ has provided and directed the church to stand firm in the gospel message (PPT) (Galatians 5:1). As a pastor once stated, some things must be decided and settled. The gospel of Jesus Christ was decided and settled over two thousand years ago. There is no room for debate concerning the salvation His grace provides. The issue facing the church today is more about what freedom in Christ looks like. Many have taken a very nonchalant approach to grace by living life on their terms, while others have gone to the opposite extreme.

We must make a choice between justification by the Law and justification by Christ. (PPT) Paul stated that by choosing the Law, the individual has fallen from grace (Galatians 5:2–4). Legalism is a trap we can quickly fall into if we are not careful. Once we cross into legalistic works, we are no longer justified by grace. Paul was adamant about this issue and pressed those he was addressing to be as well. By accepting circumcision, they were leaving grace. Paul indicated it was a choice they were making—a very dangerous one because of their complacency concerning the gospel they had received. Choosing grace does not mean we no longer need to live up to a standard of behavior; choosing grace means our standard of behavior does not provide us grace.

Paul talked to the Galatians about righteousness by faith and faith that works by love (PPT) (Galatians 5:5–6). Love is the greatest motivator. How many of us have tried to change something about ourselves when we entered a romantic relationship? One man professed that his wife liked his hair to be styled a certain way and that was why he chose to keep his hair that particular style. By growing in faith, we should also be growing in love with our Lord. By this love we are willing to live a life that is pleasing to Him, not out of a sense of obligation, but out of the love we have for our Lord. The fruit of that faith will be the works of love.

- **Why is love an important part of faith?**

Love compels us to serve one another and even fulfills the Law (PPT) (Galatians 5:13–14). As stated before, our faith should produce love, which in turn compels us to live a righteous life. Part of this living is serving others. Paul reiterated what Jesus said by stating, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Galatians 5:14, KJV).

John alluded to Jesus’ sacrifice when he asserted how love compels us: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13, KJV). Throughout the New Testament, we see examples of serving others. This selfless service is motivated by the love of God in our hearts. Only when we cultivate our relationship with Him do we maintain a level of spiritual fitness that keeps love at the forefront of our efforts.

- **Can we truly walk by faith if we do not love? Explain.**

Walking in the Spirit will manifest itself in our desires; we will want the things of God over things the flesh desires (PPT) (Galatians 5:16–17). We cannot put enough emphasis on the importance of daily prayer and devotion in our lives, which helps us walk in the Spirit. When we are getting dressed for the day, our socks and shoes will not just leap onto our feet. We must make the effort to put them on and secure them properly. So is the manner of walking in the Spirit. We must clothe ourselves in the Spirit of the Lord through our interaction with Him. Touching His presence will put us in the frame of mind to walk with Him throughout the day.

Paul held nothing back when he listed the characteristics of fleshly desires (PPT) (Galatians 5:19–21). Even though these characteristics seem extreme, the temptations usually come to us in subtle ways. When we allow ourselves to become weak in the Spirit, we experience some manifestation of allure toward things of the flesh. Though it may not be obvious at first, however, the desires of the flesh will grow more prominent. We will begin to justify our actions and tolerate doing certain things we really should avoid.

Prominent characteristics are also revealed when we are walking in the Spirit (PPT) (Galatians 5:22–23). Because of our fallible human condition, we must be able to identify and self-evaluate our spiritual condition. Like a navigator uses a map and compass to stay on course, so we must use these identifiable characteristics to put ourselves back on a proper spiritual course. God has provided us with the Bible as our spiritual map.

In order to walk and live in the Spirit, we must make deliberate choices (PPT) (Matthew 6:33; Luke 9:23). Too often we convince ourselves that our choice to live for God was a one-time decision we made at conversion. The reality is: we make choices whether to walk in the Spirit every day. Anyone who has ever tried to lose weight knows that what we eat is a deliberate decision we must make several times a day. Our choices will be reflected in the success or failure of our weight-loss goals. The deliberate choices we make daily to walk in the Spirit may not be so obvious; the choice could be something subtle like making an unsolicited remark to someone. Ecclesiastes 3:1 tells us, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (KJV). This includes a time to keep silent and a time to speak. Speaking is not an automatic function, such as breathing; we have the ability to choose to remain silent.

The key to any successful relationship is communication. Furthermore, only through consistent prayer can we connect with the Spirit of God. (PPT) Motivational speaker Anthony Robbins said, “The way we communicate with others and with ourselves ultimately determines the quality of our lives.” Even more true is the way we communicate with God; this determines the quality of our spiritual life. The fact that God desires to commune with us can be seen in the narrative of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Jesus warned us not to get caught up in vain or repetitious prayers. Our communication with God should not become like a child’s prayer for blessing the food. It should be an open and honest dialogue with our Lord.

Reading the Word of God is important because it feeds our minds and souls with the knowledge of God. (PPT) The expression “garbage in, garbage out” may seem cliché, but the expression is true. For years people have debated the effects of watching violent acts in video games and movies. Many believe graphic depictions have desensitized people, thus increasing the number of violent acts carried out in real life.

We must feed our minds with the Word of God. If proper nutrition is important to maintain good health for the physical body, then the same is true for the spirit. Every day we are bombarded with advertisements on billboards displaying inappropriate behavior or immodest dress. How can we resist the temptations these bring if we do not mentally ingest the Word of God?

- **Can you walk or live in the Spirit without a consistent connection with the Word of God? Explain.**

Fellowship with other believers is another important element in maintaining a healthy walk in the Spirit. (PPT) A famous expression says, “Birds of a feather flock together.” We cannot underestimate the power of influence by the company we keep. Peer pressure is powerful and can influence us either for good or evil. Jesus did not shy away from sinners, but He had twelve associates with whom He spent most of His time. Of course, we must work and live among others who do not live or believe as we do. This does not mean we should shun them or ignore their existence. We should interact with them. However, we must ensure we are not influenced by their lifestyles or beliefs.

Walking in the Spirit does not mean we will not be tempted. (PPT) We must, with intent, avoid or abstain from sinful activities or situations whenever possible (II Timothy 2:22). Instinctually humans move away from dangerous situations. When someone becomes a firefighter, that person must become conditioned to run toward dangerous situations instead of instinctively running away. The sinful nature of our flesh instinctively moves us toward things that will fulfill our fleshly carnal desires. Christians must condition themselves to avoid situations or activities that would be detrimental to their spiritual health. As we grow in faith and knowledge of the Lord, our ability to identify these situations will become more astute.

While most think of temptation as being obvious, what are some subtle ways we may be tempted?

When walking and living in the Spirit, we do not have shortcuts nor immunity to struggles. (PPT) Everyone loves a shortcut. If you have ever had to traverse a long distance, you know firsthand the convenience of a shortcut. Sometimes people can suffer spiritual setbacks due to ill-conceived assumptions about their faith. Some try to sell others on the idea that being a Christian means you will not suffer hardships—that life will always be good and joyous. Not only is this not true, but the Bible tells us emphatically that we will suffer hardships like everyone else. In fact, at times we will suffer hardship simply for being believers. Yet as believers we have the Spirit of God residing in us, which gives us peace in times of unrest. When we live and walk in the Spirit, we may not have immunity to struggles, but we will have access to strength and peace that surpasses all understanding.

- **How would you describe what it means to live and walk in the Spirit?**

FINISH

One of the most challenging physical feats a human will face is running in a marathon—a grueling 26.2 miles. A person cannot simply wake up and decide to go participate in a marathon. Prior planning and preparation are essential in order to succeed at this task. According to *Runner's World* magazine, someone who wishes to run a marathon should plan on training sixteen to twenty weeks in advance of the event. This person also must start out in small increments of distance in order to build up stamina, running three to five days a week, steadily increasing the distance as the day of the event approaches. The magazine also states the person should take every other day to engage in some other form of exercise in order to allow the legs proper rest and recovery.

While physical training is important, nutrition is another major factor in success. People who are training for a marathon cannot just eat anything they desire. The key is having a good nutrition plan along with proper hydration. Not only do hydration and nutrition aid in the body recovering from the rigors of training, but they also help prepare and fuel the body for the grueling effort of the marathon itself. Also mentioned is the necessity for proper shoes and well-cushioned socks. In all, training for a marathon requires proper training, hydration, nutrition, and equipment.

Walking and living by faith are similar to running a marathon. Paul even used a long distance run as a metaphor for Christian living. Throughout Scripture we see how proper spiritual preparation will enable us to successfully traverse the obstacles of life. When we pray, study the Word of God, and regularly take part in our local church, we are strengthening our faith, which gives us the endurance and resilience we need to face the hardships of life. But even more important, this prepares us to do the work God has called each of us to do.