

January 26-30, 2026 Edition

Following
The Year_(s) Of Jesus Part 212

Walking In The Spirit

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that. If they help you, great. If not, sorry.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

**** Also you can also get these devotionals on Riverside's website (EagleRiverside.com) by going to the resource section and choosing "Reflections Download".

**** Also Jesus is awesome.

Monday:

So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses. When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another. Galatians 5:16-26 (NLT)

Reflection: Today we begin a brand new lesson series looking at the Fruit Of The Spirit from Galatians chapter 5. I know I had promised you the story of the Bible in a year and many of you were looking forward to the final "episodes" on the book of Revelation but sometimes this life throws a wrench into the best laid plans and I just couldn't finish that series right now so I hope you'll forgive me for leaving you hanging.

So why are we now looking at the fruit of the Spirit? Because this is perhaps the single most important concept for a Christian to grasp in order to actually live out the lives we've been called to live. If you don't understand the concept of being led by the Spirit of God you're going to frustrate yourself and everyone around you. When I was a younger man I wasn't terribly interested in the fruit of the Spirit- I wanted POWER. I wanted to be able to do amazing things and astonish my friends and family. I wanted the Charles Atlas easy workout plan to keep the devil from kicking sand in my face on a fairly regular basis. So at first I paid little attention to Galatians chapter 5. But the more I read the Bible for myself the more I started to notice a trend- God does often share His power with us and let His miracles flow through us but He only does that with people who are developing the likeness of His Son:

We will lovingly follow the truth at all times-speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly-and so become more and more in every way like Christ. Ephesians 4:15 (TLB)

Over and over we find the writers of the Bible inviting us to become more like Jesus. But what does that mean? Theologians talk often of the communicable -vs- the incommunicable attributes of God. The "incommunicable" attributes of God are the things that we can't grab hold of and use in any way we see fit- things like His omnipotence (or all powerful), His omniscience (or all knowing) and His omnipresence (or being everywhere at once). In other words, when Paul invites us to become more and more like Jesus he is NOT inviting us to become "omni" anything. The omnis are off the table for us.

So what is Paul inviting us to? To develop Jesus' character. When we look at the fruit of the Spirit I hope we won't just see a list of good things to work on in our lives. This is more than that- this is a pretty exhaustive catalog of the character attributes of Jesus. And these attributes are "communicable". What does that mean? Have you ever heard of a communicable disease? Doesn't make the fruit of the Spirit sound too appetizing does it? But in this case all it means is that we don't have to manufacture the nine traits Paul mentions in Galatians chapter 5- if you're a follower of Jesus you already have these character germs within you. And now God wants you to grow them or if you like this metaphor- to incubate them.

Why is this series called "Marvel-Us Lives"? Because we're going to use Marvel superheroes to illustrate each of these traits or (sometimes) the opposite of these traits. Avengers, Iron Man, Captain America, Thor and even (my favorite), Spider Man. These fictitious superheroes will (I hope) help us to become sort of Superhuman ourselves by teaching us to become more like the ultimate Superhero- Jesus (a non-fictitious Superhero). In the course of this series it is my prayer that we will see exactly what it means to be working on becoming "more and more" like Jesus in our lives by nurturing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness & self control. If we do we will never be the same. If we don't we will be constantly frustrated and confused that things aren't working out the way we imagined. We will ask questions like, "why does God's power seem to flow through that person and not through me?" or "why don't my prayers make much of a difference?"



I'm not saying that it's always going to be due to us ignoring the fruit of the Spirit in our lives but I will make this bold prediction- if you (or I) are not becoming more and more like Jesus (and I'm not talking about perfection or monumental strides from where you are from one day to the next- I'm talking about progress) then you are going to live a powerless, purposeless, joyless, peaceless, patienceless (I could go on but you get the point) life. But I'll make another bold prediction- if you do make it a point to work on developing and nurturing the fruit of the Spirit in your life you will very quickly start to see the power of God at work in your life. He may not work exactly the way you would have chosen for Him to work (those of us at Riverside would never have chosen things to go the way they have gone over the last month, would we?) but the Bible does make this promise- He will always do the most loving thing for us and everyone around us. Sometimes things happen that make me wonder how THAT was the most loving thing and I don't know if I'll ever fully understand but I have learned this- I don't have to understand in order to trust. And when I trust God then even the darkest, ugliest things I can imagine can be worked into something beautiful.

So let's get to work on our characters, ok? And as we do we will see God's power in our lives and the lives of those we love in ways we never would have dreamed up or imagined.

Tuesday Reflection: Yesterday we talked about the process of becoming more like Jesus as the key to a fruitful and powerful life but where do we find this fruit? The fruit of the Spirit (Jesus' character) isn't something we have to manufacture. We don't need to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps to make ourselves shape up and act right. In fact, we can't. Human attempts at righteousness always end in an epic fail. We can't master ourselves on our own. Masterful living is beyond us. It's more a matter of self-transcendence than self-actualization. We want lives that are richer and better than we are capable of on our own. We long for the kind of connection and progress that comes from being completed by God's love - His empowerment to live the fruitful lives He designed us for. We can't be masterful, but Jesus came to teach us how to be master-filled (I wish I could take credit for that quote but this devo was written primarily by someone else... someone that lives in the same house as me... someone who... oh never mind I'm sure you know who I'm talking about). It is only in accepting that gift through our connection with Him that we have any hope of being led by the Spirit and seeing His fruit grow within us. In Galatians 5 Paul makes an interesting statement:

If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Galatians 5:18 (NLT)

Paul talks about this A LOT! What does it mean to be "under the law"? For Paul it meant trying to earn your place before God. As it turns out it's possible for us to be followers of Jesus and not Jews but still be trying to live under the law. How? By doing what we do out of gratitude for what Jesus has done for us and to honor Him and make Him proud to be associated with us, but doing what we do (doing what's right and not doing what's wrong) because we want to justify ourselves. We want to be able to stand before Him one day and feel confident in our standing not because of our connection with him but because of our ability to follow the rules better than most everyone else. It's a fine line but it's an important one. Why do you love others? Why do you do your best to be patient with irritating people? Why do you live a life of integrity? If it's because you are attempting to justify yourself (which it turns out isn't possible) then you're still living "under the law" and aren't being led by the Spirit (according to Paul in Galatians chapter 5).

So Jesus came to remind us that God has always loved us, has always been on our side, and actively longs to bless, protect and promote us. Jesus offered Himself as the bridge back into deep connection with God- not because of what we've done but because of what He did. Not because of who we are but because of Who He Is. Not because we are good but because He is Good. If we're willing to bet our lives on Jesus, He is faithful in being our Way to God and our Truth about God. He came to bring us eternal life- the opportunity to live today in cooperation with God's spirit as we walk through this world and the promise that that life will never ever end but continue in the world to come. He plugs us into God's power and teaches us step-by-step how to survive and thrive with the disorienting flow of eternity within our messy human experience. There's nothing we can face in this world that Jesus hasn't already mastered. He experienced hunger, frustration, betrayal, loss, grief, anger and joy- the whole range of the human experience. He didn't use His connection with God to escape all of the messiness we wade through every single day- He used His connection with God to forge a path to overcome it - for all of us. It's like He said here:

I told you these things so that you can have peace in me. In this world you will have trouble, but be brave! I have defeated the world. John 16:33 (NCV)

It would be SO NICE if living with Jesus meant that life could be easy, fair or even comprehensible. Jesus doesn't offer us easy- He offers us transformative. He is the author and perfecter of our faith- our spiritual journey. Just like the disciples He offers to be our model, our mentor, our teacher and our coach in this hard-knock life. Jesus didn't come to restore Eden - that ship has sailed. Sometimes this really torks me off. I want easy! I want fair! Why oh why can't we go back!?! Jesus doesn't offer that. He told His followers that in this life we will have trouble. But He reassures us that He has already overcome this world's forces. He is in the process of restoring harmony on earth one human heart at a time by restoring the fruitfulness that was the default setting of this world in the beginning and will be the default setting again when He returns to establish His Kingdom once and for all time. In fact Paul says that the fruit of the Spirit growing in our own lives is a sort of precursor to what Heaven will be like:

And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. Romans 8:23 (NLT)

Did you see it? Paul says the Holy Spirit that is within us is a foretaste (some translations say it's a first-fruit) of the glory that will come for all of Jesus' followers. I think that part of what Jesus was getting at when He said, "...let your Kingdom come and let your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven" revolves around growing the fruit of His Spirit within our lives. It is a way to bring a little of "up there" to "down here" if that makes sense. He lived a life of perfection including being a perfect 10 in every one of the character traits represented by the fruit of the Spirit. And now He invites us to be His partners, His friends and His family on this epic adventure. Maybe we can't have easy, but we can have empowered, fruitful and meaningful. Let's call that enough. We'll get easy in heaven (let's all take a moment and offer up a simple prayer of gratitude for that right now, shall we?).

My dream for us is that we invite a deeper connection with God than we've ever attempted before. That we will trust Jesus to show us how. This stuff is powerful. It's not easy or natural but it's worth the investment. Frankly our lives will be messy and frustrating whether we're trying to live life with God or not. In fact, our lives are usually harder when we're trying by our own power. The risks are higher. It means more to us. God will provide us all the strength and character producing lessons, but we need faith and hope in order to not give up or run away from the discomfort of those lessons. We build our spiritual muscles by challenging them. And honestly, it's better for the good guys to have bigger muscles than the bad guys. God's power (love, harmony, the fruit of the Spirit) is more powerful than the world's power. Love is a better motivator than self-protection, self-promotion or self-gratification. But we have to be willing to do things that don't come naturally to us like rely on Jesus and trust that He knows better than we do. God's will and wisdom are so incomprehensible to us that our knee-jerk reaction is to say - that can't possibly be right! That'll never work! The key is not to understand God's path. We don't have to convince ourselves that it makes sense- we

just have to take the next step. And that's hard enough. Tomorrow we'll discuss why that is, but for today let's remind ourselves that God has already reached out to us in Jesus. He wants to connect with us, empower us and bless us. But He won't come into our lives without our invitation. God is a respecter of boundaries. So where are your boundaries today?

Wednesday Reflection: For crying out loud, why is it so hard being human? Kermit the frog sang "it ain't easy being green," but it doesn't feel like life's easy in any color! To understand why that is, how the human experience got so messed up, we must go back to the beginning. In the garden of Eden life was easy. We didn't have to try. It was all good. God did all of the work of cultivation. We just harvested the rewards. But a life without temptation is a life without free will. We're not really being good if being bad isn't an option. We can't choose love if there isn't the ability to reject God and His way for us. God knew that love was worth the risk. Nothing is more valuable than love. It is the most valuable commodity in the universe and God wanted to be able to share an eternity of love with us. So He planted the tree of the knowledge of good and evil right next to the tree of life. He warned us that eating from that tree, gaining the knowledge of evil, would allow us to chose independence from Him- unfortunately independence from life is death. We probably had a primitive understanding of death from watching the life cycles of plants and animals (if the animals died before our fall took them down as well), but there was no way we could comprehend the death that comes from loss of connection with THE source of LIFE- but we would learn very quickly just how poorly we chose.

Eve was the first to be tempted to eat the fruit. The serpent told her that God couldn't be trusted with her protection and development.

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?" "Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'"

"You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil." The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. Genesis 3:1-7 (NLT)

The second worst day in the history of human history- and the number one worst day was a direct result of this second worst day when our Creator would allow Himself to be hung on a cross to pay the debt that His creatures incurred because we believed the lie that God didn't have our best at heart. It had to be absolutely crushing for Him. And yet He allowed it all because of love. So the serpent tempted and Eve fell for the lie hook, line and sinker.

Knowing about good and evil, he claimed, would make her like God rather than make her drop dead. Accurate, but not true. Eve signed up for the first self-help course in human history. She wanted, as we all do, to become someone better- to improve herself. She longed to be as impressed with herself as she was with God. Adam, on the other hand, didn't need the hard sell. He saw that Eve didn't drop dead and he thought, why not? That fruit looked good. Eve had already had some. Surely God wouldn't want him to miss out on anything good. Sadly, the only way to learn about good and evil is to live in a world where we experience both. Ouch. (and on a side note have you ever noticed Eve gets the majority of the blame for the fall of mankind and yet what I [this is Ed now] notice when I read this story is, at least Eve took some convincing- Adam just took the fruit and started chowing down so way to go Adam).

But God didn't turn His back on us. In a blinding display of grace He came to us and made us clothes to cover our shame. He told us what the consequences of having brought evil into this world would feel like. He explained about the hard work of cultivating and the natural estrangement that comes from a world where evil is as available as good. This messy new world would take a whole set of defense mechanisms we never needed before. Defense mechanisms are both self-serving brain biases and knee-jerk physical instincts for survival. We became aware of scarcity and limited resources which promoted competition. We hated the vulnerability of how we easily we could hurt each other which promoted walls both metaphorical and literal. These things felt like a punishment. To a child consequences feel personal and unfair. Was God punishing us? Was the serpent right that God can't be trusted with our welfare?

Because of free will you have the right to believe that. You also have the right to reject the very idea of God and live your life as if He doesn't exist. But you also have the opportunity to revisit this story with our modern insights about parenting. Today parents understand that things like gravity aren't personal punishments. They are natural laws that prevent bigger problems in a messy world. A sprained ankle that comes from trying to fly off the roof like Superman is in fact a gentler consequence than floating untethered away from the earth. It's a parent's job to teach about gravity, and then provide transportation to the hospital on the occasions that children disregard those lessons. Consequences are the teachers in this hard knock life. Children see adults as all-powerful and feel hurt when parents "let" bad things happen.

Some parents actually attempt to suspend gravity on behalf of their children. They go around saying, oh that's too hard for my little Jimmy? I love little Susie so much that I will clean up her mess and remove the consequences. Children who are "loved" like this grow up without the skills to survive and thrive in reality. They don't make powerful choices because they haven't been given the opportunity to learn from natural consequences. They expect the parent to right every wrong and make life fair. They don't have self-esteem because they've never seen themselves overcome any obstacle. Then when they become adults, and their parents can no longer buffer life's realities, they look to God and say, why aren't you making my life easy and fair? Isn't that love?

Some of life's painful consequences occur as a result of our actions. Some are the fall out from other people's poor choices. Some are just the random-seeming availability of experiences of suffering or loss- the lessons about evil that Eve chose. Jesus was right, in this world we will have trouble- but we're not in it alone. Life isn't a punishment. It's a training ground where we can become more like God and learn to trust Him the way Jesus did. We can have what Eve so longed for- a life beyond anything we could ever hope to attain on our own. Eve tried a short-cut that she was told would bring her nothing but grief and chose to believe the sneaky serpent over her loving Creator. Aren't you glad that we no longer fall for such a ridiculous illusion? Maybe not. Maybe we fall for that same illusion over and over and so carry on the family tradition of believing that we know better than God how to run our lives. But if you're ready to admit that maybe- just maybe Jesus knows better then He invites you (and me) to His school and gymnasium where Jesus is available to coach us each step of the way in developing the life we were created to live. It won't be easy but very little that is worthwhile is. Life is unfair, but God is generous.

Thursday Reflection: Yesterday we talked about why life seems so stinking hard and unfair - because it is - not as a punishment but as a school of hard knocks - a messy place where we learn about evil as well as good. The human experience involves suffering. No one is exempt from it. Jesus submitted Himself to the whole of the human experience so that He could know exactly how we feel and what it takes to find beauty even in the mess. He offers to anchor us in God's eternal presence in the midst of any storm. Jesus also experienced what it felt like to have 2 competing operating systems at work within Him - the instincts and drives of human nature as well as the spiritual capacity for divine connection. He had the same fight-or-flight responses we all have. His body prioritized survival so that He could come back to clearer thinking when the immediate threat was over. He knew stress and hunger and the temptation to escape or throw in the towel when life felt too hard to bear. His mind was susceptible to the biased thinking that triggers frustration and worry. He was fully human. He experienced the drive to be selfish and competitive and want things to go His own way. Because He lived a triumphant life anyway He is our mastery model for living life in the Spirit.

Jesus is the best seed to plant in our lives, the nourishing sun and rain, as well as the lord of the mystery of exponential life that comes from the death of a seed beneath the soil. He is our path, our example, our teacher and our coach. What He won't do is take over and live our lives for us. We can trust Jesus with the outcome, but He expects us to roll up our sleeves and cultivate our own growth. We are not passive containers of God's glory, we are participants and partners. Transformation is a process. It's our job to till the soil, plant the seed, water, weed and harvest. God won't "grow" us without our cooperation. We need to (or get to) cultivate.

It's our job to participate in our own training. Here's a modern example. Let's take 2 people; one is an athlete with a challenging training practice, and the other is sedentary. We tell them that we will give a million dollars to the one that can do the most push ups in 60 seconds. Who will win? The coach potato can want the prize as much or more than the athlete, and can try ten times harder to do the work, but the athlete will still win. There is no

real competition. Trying can't beat training. Cultivation is the key to making what we'd like to do what we're likely to do. Jesus knows that if we want to align our choices with our values (God's character) rather than be a slave to our own defense mechanisms, it's gonna take a whole lot of practice.

We have to start small and work up. We need recovery time. We need proper fuel and rest. Becoming like Jesus takes a lot of hard work and patience. It takes forgiving ourselves when we mess up. It means learning from our mistakes rather than hiding from them.

Our bodies are designed to run away from danger and avoid pain. That's a gift from God to help keep us alive. But these defense mechanisms can't deliver a fruitful life. They just aren't proactive. In order for the fruit of the Spirit to grow in us we need connection and cultivation. The connection inspires us to transcend ourselves, but without the cultivation we are susceptible to avoiding pain at any costs. In this hard-knock life pain is a warning system that we need to listen to, but it can't be put in charge. That would mean living in fear. Love is the opposite of fear. Love knows that something meaningful may involve pain, discomfort, loss and risk. Love is brave enough to do it anyway. Love knows when it's worth it. The fruit of the Spirit is worth it. Who we are becoming is worth it. It ain't easy, but I have faith that it's worth it.

Friday Reflection: This week we've talked about our default operating system with its survival advantage and its limitations. We've talked about Jesus' offer to trade up, how to learn how to live lives beyond our own natural abilities and defense mechanisms, with a supernatural operating system. We've talked about connection, how this process can only work when fueled by God's power, His Spirit of Wisdom, and hands-on tutoring with His Son. And we've talked about our role in cultivating the fruit of the Spirit - our own training program to practice using the better of the two operating systems to live our lives. We've talked about how difficult this is, and how it's all going to be worth it. But what will it look like? What do we have to look forward to?

My dream for each of us is that somewhere down the road someone will look at you or me and say, why do some people have all the luck? Look at that peace (or patience, or joy, or self-control). It must be easy for them. I'll bet it's just his personality. Why is life so generous to her? I want the fruit in our lives to make other people's mouths water until they can't help but ask us what our secret is. I know your life isn't going to be all rainbows and sunshine. Mine isn't. But I want us to live beautiful, meaningful, even enviable lives despite that. I want us to know what love is, what it isn't, and why it's worth it. I want us to know how to get joy. I want us to have access to peace no matter how bad the storm. I want us to know what it takes to grow patience. I want us to experience the power of a kindness that can outperform criticism and coercion. I want us to know why goodness is worth getting our hands dirty. I want us to be confident that faithfulness is an option for us. I want us to see the triumph of gentleness in a harsh world. And I want us to have a relationship with ourselves where we participate in our own transformation (self-discipline) in a positive and empowering way. I want us to get out of our own way and onto the best way.

What would life look like if we had the desire and ability to find the most loving option in every circumstance? How would we feel if we truly savored, celebrated and enjoyed the

blessings in our lives? How could we show up for others if we were confident of God's love and compassion even in life's tragedies? What could we do if we were even 10% more patient - more able to accept ourselves, others, and the frustrations of reality? How would this world be impacted if we practiced kindness? Who could we be if we learned what's most empowering to aim at and focus on despite this world's distractions? What would people think if we kept our agreements and followed through on our promises? How would it feel to say to only say yes when we meant it, and hold the boundary of our no when it's called for? What if the stronger we got the better we were able to be merciful and soft when that's what people needed to heal? What if we could truly set aside our self-obsession, our self-criticism and our self-conflict? What would it look like to encourage our own well-being and have compassion for ourselves and others. What burden would lift from our shoulders if we stopped trying so hard and let God empower us? I can't even imagine, but I'm curious. I'm willing to take one baby step after another to find out. Let's try this experiment together, and may God deliver a harvest that is more than we could ask or imagine