

Living by the Spirit

(Galatians 5:22-23)

Introduction

Every day things around us tempt us. Sometimes in big ways and sometimes in very small ways, we are tempted to lie, cheat, be unkind, or disobey. We've been learning about the fruit of the Spirit and how God wants this fruit to grow in our lives so that other people will know what He is like. Today we're going to learn what it means to live by the Spirit.

Opening Prayer

Father, please help us learn today what it means to keep in step with Your Spirit. Help us know how to follow You. We praise You and love You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Memory Verse

Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. (Galatians 5:25 NLT)

Lesson

We've been learning a lot about the fruit of the Spirit. By now I think we understand pretty well what love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control look like. Those are all behaviors that please God. God gives us the fruit of the Spirit to help us live our lives in a way that is pleasing to Him.

For others to see the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, we need to do things God's way. We need to follow God's directions. It's a lot like following in another person's footsteps. If you follow in someone's steps, you do what they do. If you're following in the Spirit's steps you're keeping in step with Him; you'll be doing what the Spirit would do. The more we learn about Jesus, love him, and follow him, the more fruit we will see grow in our lives!

Walking in Step

[Have the children form pairs. Allow them to practice walking in each other's footsteps, like "*Follow the Leader*."] You can walk in a straight line, in curves, around obstacles, over things, or in whatever way you can think of. The "follower" must try to get his footsteps to land exactly where the "leader's" feet stepped. Experiment with walking closely and then farther behind. [Let the kids switch roles.]

- Was it hard or easy to follow your partner?
- Was it harder or easier when you were closer? Farther away?

When you kept your eyes closely on your partner, it was easier to follow him. When we keep our minds and hearts focused on God, it's easier to follow what He wants for our lives. Living by the Spirit means keeping our eyes on God so we can live to please Him. It means not living by our sinful nature.

What does living by the sinful nature mean? Each of us is born with a *want* to do things our own way. Our old sinful nature tempts us to do things that are against God. This is called our sinful nature.

Galatians 5 speaks a lot about the difference between living according to the Spirit and living according to the sinful nature.

Galatians 5:16-17

So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. (17) 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.

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear. Look in your Bibles and read Galatians 5:19 – 21 to yourselves. When we follow Jesus, we don't want that sinful part of ourselves anymore. We want to do what Jesus would do in every situation.

It's important for us to understand what it means to live by the Spirit. Each time we're tempted to do something, we must ask ourselves, "*Is this something that would please God?*" If the answer is, "*No*" your sinful nature is in control of you.

Let me read a story to you about Ralph:

One day Ralph went for a walk. As he strolled down the lane, he passed many people. As he passed an old lady, he noticed a twenty-dollar bill drop from her purse onto the street. Suddenly, his head was filled with thoughts.

- What do you think his sinful nature said?
- What do you think the Spirit of God said?
- What would you choose to do?

*Ralph reached for the twenty-dollar bill and handed it to the old lady. She thanked him and he went on his way, feeling filled with **kindness** and **goodness**.*

Then, Ralph decided he'd go see a movie. There were four movies playing at the theater: one was a movie his mother would not let him see. But his mom was not with him now. Again, his head was filled with thoughts.

- What do you think his sinful nature said?
- What do you think the Spirit of God said?
- What would you choose to do?

*Ralph decided to see one of the movies that was OK with his mom. Suddenly he felt **peace** and **self-control**.*

After buying his ticket, Ralph received the wrong change. He had received change for a twenty when he had paid with a ten-dollar bill. He had too much change! His head again filled with thoughts.

- What do you think his sinful nature said?
- What do you think the Spirit of God said?
- What would you choose to do?

*Ralph handed the cashier the extra ten-dollar bill. The cashier nearly cried when she realized the mistake she had made and was relieved by Ralph's honesty and thanked him. Ralph's heart was filled with **faithfulness** and **joy**.*

Ralph walked into the theater and sat down. As he waited for his movie to begin, he realized that each time he had been tempted by his sinful nature, he had been wise enough to choose to live by the Spirit, not by his sinful nature. As a result, the fruit of the Spirit increased in his life.

Have you ever had your head filled with thoughts like these? When? What did you end up doing? Can you think of any ways your life has changed because of your good choices?

God hopes that we'll make choices to keep in step with His Holy Spirit. He knows that it's for our best to live this way. When we choose to live according to the Spirit, we grow closer to God and become more like Him. His personality begins to show more in our lives, and we begin to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit.

Role-Play Reactions

Form pairs and we'll take turns role-playing these different situations:

- You love to go in-line skating. One day after school your mom asks you to give the dog a bath before you go out to skate. Your friends can only skate for the next 45 minutes. Your sinful nature doesn't want to take the time to wash the dog first, maybe Mom won't notice. The Spirit tells you to obey your Mom. Act out what you would do.
- You're hungry when you come home from school and want a cookie really bad. Mom tells you to wait until after dinner. Your sinful nature wants to sneak into the kitchen, eat a cookie quickly, and then lie to your mom about it. The Spirit says to tell the truth, even if you get in trouble for it. Act out what you would do.

- A new kid comes to your school. She looks different from the other kids at your school. Your sinful nature wants to avoid her because she's different. The Spirit wants you to make friends with the new girl. Act out what you would do.
- You're playing on the playground at school. A bully comes by and steals your football. Your sinful nature wants to get even by stealing his lunch from his locker. The Spirit wants you to use your words to work out your problem. Act out what you would do.
- Your neighbor has a new dog, and she has invited you over to play and see the new dog. You really want to go, but Dad has said that you may not because dinner is almost ready. Your sinful nature wants to beg, whine and complain until you get your way. The Spirit wants you to accept your dad's decision and work toward another chance to see the neighbor's dog. Act out what you would do.
- You've been playing in the empty field behind the old grocery store and twist your ankle when you step into a hole. Your sinful nature wants you to lie to your parents about where you were when the accident happened. The Spirit wants you to tell the truth, no matter what kind of trouble you might get into. Act out what you would do.

Every day we make decisions: little decisions and big decisions. Sometimes we allow the Spirit to influence our choices; and other times we let our sinful natures influence us. As we live by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit, we begin to see the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. When we use the fruit of the Spirit to help us in difficult situations, we please God.

When we spend time in God's Word, and talk to God regularly, our fruit will start to grow! And it's going to grow and grow and grow, until it's overflowing in our lives. So when we have all this fruit growing in our lives—all this love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—what should we do with it?

God wants us to share it, to use it, and to give it away. The fruit of the Spirit helps others know what God's love looks like.

When we live our lives to please God, we become more and more like Him. As we do that, the fruit of the Spirit becomes more and more evident in our lives and other people will know that we have a close walk with Jesus.

We need to pray for God to help us in our actions, so that we can tell others what it means to be a Christian by simply behaving in ways that please our heavenly Father.

Closing Prayer

Father, please help us not to follow our sinful natures, but to follow your Holy Spirit. We love You so much. We know that we don't always do the things that please you. But Father, we know that you help us do what is right by growing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Help us, Lord, to walk in Jesus' footsteps and show others love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In Jesus' name, Amen.

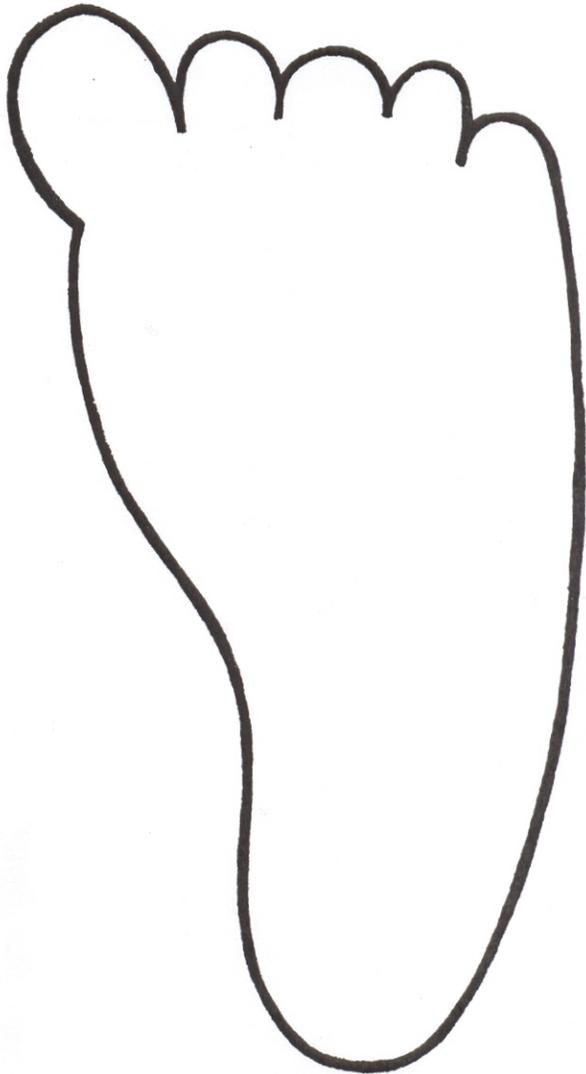
Learning Activities

Snack

Prepackaged fruit chew snacks.

Craft Corner

Make a large foot print pattern for the children to trace and cut out of construction paper. Have them write today's verse on it.



Game Center

Use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. What does it mean to live by the Spirit? (To choose to do things God's way.)
2. What can you do to make it easier to follow God and do what pleases Him? (Read the Word, pray, choose godly friends.)
3. What is the sinful nature? (Each of us is born with a *want to* do things our own way. Our old sinful nature tempts us to do things that are against God.)
4. Can you think of any ways your life has changed because of your good choices?
5. When we have all this fruit growing in our lives—all this love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—what should we do with it? (God wants us to share it, to use it, and to give it away.)
6. How will people know if you have a close walk with Jesus? (They'll see the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.)

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