

Walking With the Father Through Galatians

Over the years, I've found my life changing and my faith deepening as I meet with our heavenly Father in His word. This has been especially true as I've been writing these devotionals and having to live what I write.

I long for you to be able to say the same as you read through this letter.

As I've gotten to know Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and John through their letters, I'm overwhelmed by how they were changed by knowing and walking with their Lord. How much they must have longed for us to know Him as they did.

As John wrote in 1 John 2:3-6, he wants us to walk as Jesus did and believed that it was absolutely possible to do so. So how did Jesus walk? That's one secret our Father shares with us.

Blessings on your time as we take another walk with the Father,

Margie Martin

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Paul's letter to the believers living in the region of Galatia, modern day Turkey, was probably the third letter he wrote that we have in the New Testament. This region was actually like a country with the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

Paul wrote this letter during his second missionary journey sometime around 55-56 A.D. He was probably living and ministering in Greece in the city of Corinth, but very possibly he had moved on to Ephesus in Galatia. Regardless of where he was living, the contrast between his current city's lifestyle issues and the Galatians' legalism must have been uppermost in his mind.

For more background of what Paul encountered when he met the believers he was writing to in this letter, see these passages:

Acts 13:13-14:23

Paul's first missionary journey

Acts 16:1-6

Paul's second missionary journey

Acts 18:23

Paul's third missionary journey



New Testament World

As you spend time in this letter, please take the time to talk with our Father about what He's showing you so you're not just gathering information. As you pray, you can use the space on each page to journal your thoughts or write Him a note.

Walking With the Father Through Galatians

Galatians 1:1-5

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the evil age, according to the will of our God and Father”

Grace

Do you ask these questions too: *How do I get what I need to live life? What are my resources for living life? When I need wisdom or perspective or patience or courage, what do I do? What should I do? What do I depend on when the pressure starts to overwhelm me?*

Paul’s answer to these questions is *grace*, which can be defined as all of **G**od’s **r**esources **a**t **C**hrist’s **e**xpense. All we need to handle life are God’s resources, and they are available because Jesus *gave* Himself for our sins and rescued us from the evil age. These resources—His life—are just waiting for us to use. But how do we do that?

Peace

What do we do when we feel uneasy, out of sorts, at war with ourselves or others, agitated, restless, wound up tighter than a clock? Where do we go? How should we proceed? What should we do?

Paul says that the peace we need in these situations is available because:

- Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins.
- Jesus Christ rescued us from this evil age.

because:

- God our Father, out of His love for us, wanted this for us.
- God His Father asked Him to give up everything so we could have Him and the life He intends for us.

So what should we do?

- **Thank** Him for what He’s done.
- **Submit** to Him as Lord and therefore the one in charge.
- **Depend** on His life within you.
- **Choose** behaviors that reflect Him and not this evil age.
- **Keep on** thanking, submitting, depending, and choosing.

What’s going on in your life and heart today? Are you in need of grace or peace? Is it time to *thank, submit, depend, and choose*?

Walking With the Father Through Galatians

Galatians 1:6-10

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel."

If the Galatians could follow a different gospel after hearing it first-hand from Paul, what gospel are we following? Who are we listening to? Perhaps charting the truth in this section will help us sort out which gospel we're living by.

Christ's Gospel

- Its foundation is Christ's death and resurrection.
- It provides eternal life.
- Followers seek approval of God.
- It results in a lifestyle of serving Christ.

Different Gospel

- Its foundation is doing life by myself; it results in confusion and perversion of Christ's gospel (and confusion and perversion in our lives).
- It results in followers being eternally condemned.
- Followers seek approval of others.
- It results in a lifestyle of doing our own thing.

The word *gospel* means "good news." But the news of the "different gospel" results in confusion and perversion, being eternally condemned, always searching for approval from others (who are just as fickle as we are), and a lifestyle of doing what we think is right, which quickly conflicts with someone else's choices. This conflict gets us into real messes with each other when neither of us wants to back down or give in. Where's the "good" in that news?

Christ's gospel, however:

Has the power of the resurrection behind it.

Promises eternal life.

Seeks the approval of God, who is perfect and never changes.

Results in a lifestyle of serving Christ—the Author of life.

Sounds good to me. Which gospel do you see operating in your life? Time to make a change?

Walking With the Father Through Galatians

Galatians 1:11-24

“And they praised God because of me.”

Paul chose Christ’s gospel after he had received it through a personal revelation from Jesus Christ Himself. Paul quickly saw that the type of life he had led had come from following a religious way of living. He had to take the time (years) to learn from Jesus and have his life be changed in the process—and changed he was! No longer did he pride himself on his background or career choices—but God certainly used them for our sakes. No longer did he seek the approval of men who were his peers or try to please them (1:10). His goal was to seek God’s approval and please Him only.

The result? This section says that believers who knew only of his story but hadn’t met him actually *praised* God because of Paul.

Paul didn’t hide his background or former way of life (how could he—he was so well known!), but he also didn’t take pride in himself any longer. When people heard about the transformation, they didn’t say, “Wow, that Paul; he’s quite a guy.” Rather, they praised God.

How do we share our stories? Are we honest about who we were and are? Do we really believe that we’ve been rescued from the evil age because of what Christ did on the cross? Who gets the praise from our stories? Do we bring the glory back to us, or is God honored and praised because of what He’s done in our lives?

If you’ve been bringing attention to yourself when you talk about your walk with God, how could you retell your story or share your life now so that He is honored?

Let’s seek to understand the amazing miracle of what Jesus did for us, let Him do His transforming work in our lives, and then tell our stories so God is praised. Because it really is all about Him!

Walking With the Father Through Galatians

Galatians 2:1-10

“James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me.”

Whom do you listen to? Whose opinion do you trust? What standards do you use to evaluate the weight of someone else’s opinions? Whom do you respect? Why? Why do you choose them?

Paul seems to have worked through these questions and gives us some of his conclusions in this paragraph. Have you reached these conclusions as well?

- Some people *seem* to be important.
- Their opinions of themselves don’t have to make a difference to us.
- God doesn’t judge by external appearances.
- When God gives us a task, that task is important because God Himself is working.
- We don’t *need* the approval or affirmation of church leaders (if God has given the task, that’s all that’s needed).
- If the church leaders are walking with the Lord as well, they will eventually extend the right hand of fellowship because they recognize the grace God has given.
- We can receive the right hand of fellowship because “the ground is level at the foot of the cross,” and we’re all sons of God and part of the Body of Christ.

Now, whom should we be listening to?

Whose opinion should we trust?

What standards . . .

Walking With the Father Through Galatians

Galatians 2:11-21

“And when I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel . . .”

We’ve been talking about grace these days: what it is, how we receive it, how we can extend it to and receive it from other believers. Now Paul begins to talk about how it is to be seen in our lifestyles. Ready?

Paul and Peter have a good, mutually encouraging, and supportive relationship. Both are leaders and are walking their talk. But when Peter comes to visit, he starts forgetting what we just looked at in the previous section. He listens to the wrong people and worries about their opinion of him instead of God’s opinion. The result? Public embarrassment and an attack at his spiritual pride. Conclusion? When spiritual leaders lead followers down the wrong path, God gets involved.

Paul rightly sees that our walk of faith needs to be *“acting in line”* (or *“straightforward”* (NASB)) *“with the truth of the gospel.”* No deviations, no red herrings, no sightseeing excursions. The gospel cost Jesus everything. He gave up everything, even His life, for us.

This is why Paul is so adamant. He tells us, *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.”* (v. 20)

Are you willing to give up what you’re holding on to so tightly so you can know Him and experience **all** that He has for you in this life and the next?

Is God asking you to give up something for the sake of the gospel? The music you listen to? The books you read? The movies and TV that fill your time? Relationships that don’t honor Him? Spending or hoarding habits that don’t involve Him in your finances? Alcohol? Food? Lust?

Are you living for yourself or for the One who gave Himself up for you?

Walking With the Father Through Galatians

Galatians 3:1-14

“You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?”

Paul wonders here—with great concern—about how these dear believers are living out their lives with Jesus. They started out so well. They knew Jesus was crucified for them. They received the Spirit by faith. But now it’s as though they’ve been bewitched and are trying to live by their own efforts, by following a list of rules, do’s and don’ts, and principles, instead of depending on the life of their risen Lord who lives within them.

Why would they do this?

Why would we do this? Do we really understand the truth of the gospel? Has it penetrated our hearts, and does it keep penetrating our hearts? Are we really ready to die to pride, with wanting to look good to others but in essence smelling bad to God? Whose opinion do we really care about? Have we been bewitched into thinking that external appearances, comfort, and fitting into the world around us will give us the deep sense of peace we’re longing for? What do you think? How are you living?

It was by faith that we received Jesus. It is by faith that we receive the promise of the Spirit. It is by faith in the power of our risen Lord living in us that we can really live the life He has for us. And it’s a life worth living!

How are *you* living?

Walking With the Father Through Galatians

Galatians 3:15-25

“So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.”

Paul is certainly extolling the covenant/promise that God gave to Abraham, and he firmly states the necessity of faith for salvation. So then, why *did* God institute the law? Included in the law were the exact dimensions for building the tabernacle, all of the moral laws, the civil laws, the dietary laws, the feasts, and the sacrifices.

Why wasn't the promise enough? It was for Abraham. It was for Isaac and Jacob. It made a man out of Joseph. It turned Sarah's fear to faith.

The answer may be that God was working through these patriarchs of the faith to create a *nation* that was going to grow and multiply in Egypt, first in favorable conditions and then in slavery—a horrible condition that created a longing for freedom that only God could bring. And while God certainly *could* be everywhere doing everything to bring all the Hebrew people to faith individually, He seems instead to be working at drawing them together as a nation, a body.

So we see the nation hungering for release from slavery, but they thought that their slavery was only external. God knew, however, that they needed to learn about their internal slavery that came through sin. So He gave them the law, His standard of how to live and how to respond to Him. And they learned over hundreds of years and many generations that living by the law didn't perfect them in their attitudes and motives and actions. A new hunger was developing in the nation—a hunger that only Jesus would be able to satisfy.

Do you have a hunger growing in you for peace, freedom, direction, or joy? Could God be orchestrating your circumstances so your hunger becomes so great that only He can satisfy it?

What do you think?

Walking With the Father Through Galatians

Galatians 3:26-4:7

“Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’”

The law didn’t work to change us, but it did lead us to something better—a personal, loving, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship came when we believed that Jesus’ death on the cross fully paid the price for our sins and for our very born-with nature that *wants* to sin. Jesus’ sacrifice accomplished something else that’s totally amazing: it *so* satisfied His Father’s hatred of and anger with sin that Jesus didn’t have to stay dead! God raised Him to a newness of life that had never been seen or known about before.

(For you Bible students, this concept of God’s righteous anger being satisfied by the cross so He is free to love is the definition of *propitiation*. This word is found in the NASB version but not in the NIV.)

And if this wasn’t enough, God sent the Spirit of His risen Son into our hearts so that now the risen Jesus—who knows no limits of time or space or power—lives in us. No longer do we have to ask God to give us _____ (fill in the blank). He has given us all we need since His Son lives in us through the Holy Spirit. Instead of asking for more of anything, we can thank Him for what He has already provided and begin to make choices that reflect the power of His life within us.

How do we know that this is true? How do we experience this life? Paul says that we now have a new sense of who God is. Instead of being external, inanimate, and distant, we can know Him as our *Father*, our daddy, the one we can go to with every issue and in every situation. He is the one our earthly fathers should model but rarely do. God is the perfect Father—the one we’ve longed to know all our lives. Please don’t let a bad or not-so-good relationship with your own dad color your relationship with God. Rather, let Him show you what He as a real Dad looks like. God is the Heavenly Father Jesus knew and talked to continually throughout His earthly ministry, the one He went to with every issue and in every situation, the one He called out to when He was on the cross.

Do you have this type of relationship with your Heavenly Father? Do you want to have it? Or are you just too busy? It’ll take time, effort, humility, and surrendering your life. Want to start for the first time, start again, or go deeper today—right now? Then begin writing, and talk to Him.

Walking With the Father Through Galatians

Galatians 4:8-20

“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,”

Paul, a man, using the experience of childbirth to describe his relationship with these believers in Galatia? This section is probably the most intense and personal outpouring of his heart in all of his letters. Read the passage again, and note all of the *I*'s and *you*'s. This truth isn't theory or doctrine to him; it's the difference between freedom and slavery, life and death. And Paul's concern is wrapped up in his reference to childbirth.

In the natural world when a child is born, he (I'll use the masculine pronoun for ease of writing) comes out of the womb with all his fingernails and toenails, internal organs, and DNA. But this baby isn't *totally* formed yet. He is born in a particular time and place and to a particular set of parents, all of which will combine with his innate personality and life experiences to form him as total person.

In the Greek language, two words are used for *formed* in the New Testament: one word means “to mold or shape, and was used of the artist who worked in clay or wax;” the English word plastic comes from this word PLASSO.

The other Greek word is MORPHOO, which is the word in this section, and it refers to the inward and real, not the external and transient. (*Metamorphosis* comes from this root word.) In our verse it refers to a change in our spiritual condition that is first reflected in our character and then in our conduct so we really are becoming like Christ.

These Galatians were children in their faith, and Paul's work with them would not be finished until they were growing up in their faith and walking *with* their Lord. And he is in agony over them because of their decisions that keep them from maturing.

Where are you in the “growing up” process? Take a good, long look at your character and your behaviors. How do you line up with Jesus' example? Maybe you want to use the fruit of the Spirit as a standard: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (or control of self) from Galatians 5:22. Be honest now. Are you like a baby in the faith, a teenager, or a senior citizen? How is Jesus being *formed* in you?

Walking With the Father Through Galatians

Galatians 4:21-31

“Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.”

From our last passage, one of our first questions could be “*how* can Christ be formed in me?” My first response would be to say, “First do this, and then this, and then this.” But Paul goes back into Jewish history to review two women and their sons—Hagar and Ishmael and Sarah and Isaac. Paul’s conclusion? Know who your spiritual mother is. Know the type of birth she gave you. In other words, know your identity.

Let’s see how this would work. If we charted this information, it would look something like this:

Hagar	Sarah
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A slave• Son had ordinary birth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Free• Son was born as a result of a promise—a miracle
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Covenant came from Mt. Sinai (the law)• Bears children who are slaves• Corresponds to present city of Jerusalem• Her son persecutes the son of promise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A new covenant (Jesus in us)• Bears children who are free• Corresponds to the new Jerusalem that is above, heavenly• Dismissed the slave woman and her son; they were not to live together
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Son will never share in the inheritance of the promise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Son has the inheritance of the promise

What a contrast! And the *how* of the forming is knowing, accepting, and believing the truth about our inheritance and therefore our identity. Slavery is so easy to fall into though; it’s tempting and comes at us from all directions. A child can’t appreciate his inheritance; he just wants to play. But a maturing believer can evaluate a situation or an emotion and make a choice.

Paul now appeals to the Galatians as brothers. He knows his family background and wants them to live theirs. So, what is your family background? How you are living (see yesterday’s truth) will reveal who you’ve chosen to be your spiritual mother. Are you living as a slave to your emotions, your own effort, and your background—or are you free?

Walking With the Father Through Galatians

Galatians 5:1-15

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

Freedom! The cry of every heart, especially teenagers who have been under the *yoke* of their parents and teachers. But what normally happens when someone *suddenly* gets freedom? You’re right—they go wild. Here in Georgia too many teenagers die in single-car accidents when 16-year olds get a driver’s license and then a car. We saw chaos in Russia when the Soviet regime fell and a black market took over. We saw looting and chaos in Iraq after the fall of a horrible 30-year long dictatorship.

We think that freedom means getting to do what *I* want to do *when* I want to do it. That sounds great to me, but how does my doing what I want to do affect you? And what happens when what you want to do collides with what I want to do? Who wins? And if what I want to do changes each day (or each hour), how do I get anything done? Sounds like I’m becoming a slave again to my desires and emotions, as well as being in conflict with you and within myself.

But God (those wonderful words) has another plan. He says in this section through Paul:

- *The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.* (v. 6)
- *Use your freedom to serve one another in love.* (v. 13)
- *Love your neighbor as yourself.* (v. 14)

Freedom, then, is freedom from myself. I don’t have to be in charge any longer—wanting my own way at the expense of others. I can be free from my self-absorbed nature to care for others, to serve them in love, to bring Christ into every situation (since He is *in* me) so He can redeem situations and people, just as He’s redeemed me. Ah, freedom!

Think about your relationships. How would you describe them? Do you see conflict, anger, selfishness? So that’s the other person; how about you? Are you giving, loving, serving? If so, are you this way because you want something from others or because Jesus has so given, loved, and served you that **His** life is *overflowing* to others?

How are you using your freedom?

Walking With the Father Through Galatians

Galatians 5:16-26

“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

The next question we need to ask is *how* do I live out the freedom that comes from Christ? What does it mean to serve another in love—what does it look like?

This section contrasts what happens when the sinful nature or the Spirit is in control. Perhaps listing the contrasts will help us understand the differences.

- Sinful nature has desires contrary to the Spirit.
- Sinful nature and the Spirit are in conflict with each other.
- Sinful nature puts us under the law.
- Acts of the sinful nature use and abuse others.
- **But**, those who belong to Christ have put to death this nature with its passions and desires. The result is harmony, peace, and beauty.

To live this out, Paul says we have a choice: we can become conceited (puffed up), provoking and envying each other, or we can keep in step with the Spirit.

This keeping in step is a picture of an army in step with each other. My own experience with this picture comes from my years of being in a high school marching band. Oh, did we have to practice to keep in step—while we were walking straight down the football field, while we were playing our instruments, while we were practicing formations, and even while we were getting to and from the field. We practiced for hours before we were ready for anyone to see us. And all the time we were marching, we had to watch the person at the far right of our line in our peripheral vision. This was the person we had to line up with and keep in step with. This person didn't have to check in with us, but he or she was always aware of what we were doing. If we were off, we'd hear an “Eyes right!” as a reminder of the one with whom we were to keep in step.

Who are you keeping in step with? Is anyone at the end of your line? Is chaos or conflict ruling in your life and heart? Time to let Someone else be in charge?

Walking With the Father Through Galatians

Galatians 6:1-10

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

So here we are, walking, walking, walking in step with the Spirit. But what should this look like in our everyday lives of going to the office, to school, to the grocery store and the cleaners, to the movies and ballgames, to the park with the kids, to church, with our finances, and even with our sex lives?

Paul says we’re to be doing “good” in our activities. To me this means being kind and considerate while I am working hard, to let the fruit of the Spirit be a refreshment to others. It means listening to others when they need to talk and gently asking questions that will help them think. It means cooking meals or going grocery shopping for those who are overwhelmed with life at that moment, including my own family. It means being a considerate driver. It means saying a kind word instead of a harsh one. It means training the next generation instead of letting them be irresponsible. It means _____ (you fill in the blank). And all of this is tiring! It takes effort and time and perhaps money. But if this is the way the Spirit is leading us to walk in our lives, we need to keep in step. Paul knows that the Spirit is preparing a harvest, and he wants us to have a share in it. So we are to keep on walking, walking, walking.

Paul gives some other examples of what a spiritual walk will look like. It means:

- *Restoring* (like setting a broken bone or repairing a fishing net) those who are caught in a trap of sin.
- *Helping* others carry their heavy loads in life without thinking we’re better or worse than they are, while at the same time carrying our own light backpacks.
- *Sharing* our lives and our resources with those who teach us so they can keep on teaching.
- *Doing good* to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers.

Are you weary today? Are you tired of always giving? Or do you rarely do good as Paul is describing it? I guess what we *do* determines the type of harvest we will reap. I want mine to be bountiful; how about you?

Walking With the Father Through Galatians

Galatians 6:11-18

“Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.”

Paul began this letter with offering grace and peace to his readers. He now concludes it with peace and mercy—to those who follow “this” rule. A rule to follow to receive peace and mercy? Something we can *do*? Sounds good to me; I’m a doer. Let’s look at the rule:

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. (vv. 14-15)

Oh. Does this mean that I can’t boast in myself, my abilities, my accomplishments, my good looks, my personality, my background, my knowledge, my degrees—or in the lack in any of these areas? No. If I really want peace and mercy (and I do!), I can boast only in what Jesus did on the cross. Nothing in this world can hold a candle to that.

And because of that act of love, we are new creatures. *“The old has gone, the new has come!”* (2 Corinthians 5:17) It doesn’t matter what we *do* for God; what counts is what He did and is continuing to do—and then living in the truth of that knowledge by choosing to keep in step with the Spirit daily, hourly, and moment-by-moment.

What do you find yourself boasting about—positive or negative? If you’re boasting in yourself, is it really accomplishing what you want to achieve in this life? Perhaps it’s time to begin boasting in the cross of Christ?

Paul concludes this letter by saying to them and to us, *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers [and sisters]. Amen.”*
