

## Growing in Grace Together | Luke 9:57-62 & Galatians 5:16-25 | Proper 8C, June 29 2025

My favorite seminary professor often said that the most personal is often the most universal. Translation: just about everything we all don't want to talk about, we all have gone through.

Case in point: Our scripture reading from Galatians 5, specifically verses 19 through 21, what Paul calls the works of our flesh. None of us really want to talk about any of these, I'm sure. And to be really frank, I'm not really interested in spending my time up here picking on any one of them. So we can relax a bit.

But I'm sure we can all agree each one of those is a problem in our world. And I'm sure every one of us has struggled with something on this short list at some time by nature of all of us being human. So, do you see what I mean about the most personal often being the most universal?

So, what do we do? Well, we look to the next list in verses 22 and 23, the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control).

So, there you have it, folks. What you should stop doing is all the bad stuff and what you should start doing is all the good stuff. See ya next week.

Just kidding. The truth is, it's hard to be a good Christian, isn't it? Or, well, it's easy and it's hard. It's all grace. It's all grace but sometimes God's grace comes to us as a little fire under our rear ends, getting us in the right direction. Do you all know what I mean?

Like, I think I'm fairly good at love, joy, peace, and all that. And I think that folks here generally are fairly good at them too. So, I'm not trying to wag my finger and come at you like me and God have been talking about you behind your back.

But, when we look at the works of our flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, which do you think we could all, if we had to, grow deeply in by next week? Really, which list could you easily do double, or even triple of, by next week (if you had to)?

And further, which list contains things that you didn't even go out looking for, they just sorta crept into your life. It's like you stepped in them and now you gotta scrape your spiritual shoes off.

Now, really, just to drive my point home, by contrast, which list has some things you've been working on in yourself for years and you still feel like you're nowhere near where you need to be?

Church, here's your first bit of good news this morning. We're all like that. The most personal is often the most universal. You know, that's not to say we don't all have our differences and uniquenesses. We all have our own gifts, challenges, and stories; of course. We are all on a unique journey of faith. But, at the same time, the good news is that we're all kinda the same too. As Martin Luther said, "Simul Iustus et Peccator" – Christians are all simultaneously saints and sinners. To put it more succinctly, every one of us has things we struggle with and things we're working towards.

And so, here's what I want to do today. Let's look at three things our scripture readings show us not about how to be perfect because we're never going to be perfect. None of us. But let's look at three things we can all do to grow in grace together. Because I get the sense we all woke up early on Sunday morning because we all do genuinely want to grow as Christians and I do see some good news here.

So, let's look first at our Luke 9 scripture. The **first thing** I see that shows us how to grow in grace together is here. And what it is is really an extended dialogue wherein Jesus drives home the point that we all need a purpose.

Let's look at that for a moment. And for this, see, Jesus is going to use some harsh words. But I want you to imagine playing it out. Like, imagine for a moment you were in Jesus' shoes.

So, a guy comes to Jesus. "Hey Jesus, I would love to follow you. Your lordship in my life, your kingdom, your forgiveness and mercy, the fact that every step of the way really is a grace that you have held up for me ahead of time, I'm all on board." And Jesus says to the man "Great, well I'm homeless. So, maybe bring a tent and some good sandals. Oh and by the way, I'm actually on my way to Jerusalem now where I will be crucified and my followers will similarly be driven out of the towns and persecuted really until kingdom comes."

We don't hear from that guy again. Instead, the next guy comes to Jesus. "Hey Jesus, I would love to follow you." Jesus says, "great, let's go." This guy says "well, ok, I have my dad's funeral coming up. So, that was kinda rude of you, Jesus. And then after that we were all going to go to Wet and Wild. And then it's back to school season, that's coming early this year so..."

We don't hear from him again either. Instead, a third guy comes to Jesus. "Hey Jesus, I would love to follow you." Jesus says, "great, let's go." This guy says "well, ok, uhhhhhh I really think I should probably go say hey to my mom and them first, see what they're doing and all that. Anyway, see ya later."

Verse 62: "Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'"

Another way to put that is to identify a purpose, a way of connecting your life to something beyond itself. You know, it's calling out that we can all get caught up in this thing, and that thing, and gotta go here, do this, do that... and the end result is we never really go anywhere. After all, our lives are ultimately built by what we do. Not what we'd like to do or imagine we'll do or think would be good to do. Life is what you do.

And so, the first thing we see this morning is to intentionally refresh yourself from time to time on your purpose. We're all here for a reason. Sometimes life just gets busy and we forget that. So, that's our first thing today.

Now, the **next thing** I want us to see here is in our scripture reading from Galatians. And what I specifically want us to see is the underlying metric Paul is using for his lists here. I think it helps to understand his logic. Because, see, I want us to be able to apply his logic and his metric onto our own faith journeys and be able to see our own progress a bit better. Because, honestly, I trust the power of the Holy Spirit enough to trust that God has grown each and every one of us in some dramatic ways over the course of our lives.

So, with the works of the flesh, verses 19 through 21, I just want us to notice that Paul is not listing every possible sin we could ever commit. Instead, he really just has two kinds of basic issues: things that obviously hurt our neighbors and things that anyone with half a brain could tell you will end up hurting our neighbors. So, that's Paul's metric. How well are we able to love our neighbor?

And with that, see, there really is a lot of wisdom. Because if it's about loving our neighbors then first of all the metric for our growth isn't us doing something alone and isolated. And it's not hidden in some book somewhere or after one more class or one more podcast or anything like that. And it's not about us being smart or grand or successful or attractive or anything else like that. It's great if those are working out for you too. But, the metric Paul is handing us by way of the Galatians to measure our spiritual growth is "how well am I loving my neighbors?"

And I think there is great joy and honestly at times, for all of us, some great difficulty in that; so that's our second thing to see today: the metric we should judge our spiritual growth by is "how well am I loving my neighbors?" And of course,

you're welcome to defer to Paul's list for specific examples.

But, now, the **third and final thing** for us to see today is in the Fruit of the Spirit. And what it is specifically is the Greek word used for love here.

As many of you all know, I'm sure, there are a handful of different Greek words for "love" during New Testament times and just as a culture and context, folks thought of love as a couple of different things. There was philia, where we get Philidelphia, the City of \_\_\_\_? (Brotherly love). You know, having friends. There's eros, romantic love. There's storge - family style empathy. And then there's agape, God's holy and selfless love. That's the one we're dealing with here.

And with agape, God's holy and selfless love, primarily we see as Christians the greatest example of it with Jesus on the cross. That was, after all, his saving act by which sinners were reconciled to God. It's the literal definition of agape love.

But, see, the way Paul puts it here is that it's also just the primary Fruit of the Spirit. Quite literally the primary thing that the Holy Spirit will produce through you. See, this is another way to look at the differences between the two lists. The first list, the works of the flesh, are all this "me, me, me" kind of attitude. But, the fruit of the Spirit all, by nature, exist in an "all of us" kind of way. After all, it really has to. Again, for it to be "selfless" love, there kinda has to be someone else involved.

And it actually goes even further than that. See, if we dug into the Greek here for the Fruit of the Spirit, we'd see that there really should be a period after love. What I mean by that is Paul actually writes "love" as the singular fruit of the Spirit wherein it's more like joy, peace, patience, kindness, and all that are parts of that love.

So, to put that all together, what Paul is saying here in Galatians 5 is not to do a bunch of stuff that is all about "me, me, me" but instead to let the Holy Spirit bear His primary fruit in your life which is selfless love.

And so, if I can put all that another way, the third thing for us to see today is that God really does bless our ability to get over ourselves. Really, I mean it and it's very good news. God blesses our ability to let go of our own little worries and issues and all that, and really does encourage our ability to just get ourselves out of the way and love others.

Let me illustrate it briefly because I know you all will know it when you see it pointed out for you. So, this past week, we had a number of volunteers at VBS. Folks who woke up early, who decided their purpose this week was to connect their lives to something beyond themselves. Who made it all about us, not "me, me, me." I want us to know that's exactly what Paul is talking about here!

I mean, honestly, y'all, I saw huge smiles from folks as they got blasted by a 2nd grader with a supersoaker. If that's not the joy that comes with selfless love, what is?

I saw serenity wash over folks' faces as they swept up a very messy fellowship hall, knowing that they still had four more days of it. If that's not peace that comes from selfless love, what is?

One more, I saw a full grown adult dig through what must have just been a bottomless bin because apparently the pink marker a student had was not the correct pink. Is that not patience coming to us from selfless love?

God really does bless us getting over ourselves. God blesses our ability to let go of our own little worries and instead just love others.

Let's pray...

Lord, we have heard the urgency in our scripture readings this morning.  
And yes Lord, we want to be useful to you.  
Especially as our world continues to showcase itself at its worst.  
As violence and brokenness abound.  
We ask that there would be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and much more  
Let these things be the things we see in our lives  
Let these heighted virtues be the news story of the day  
And let it begin with us Lord.

Let us make his purpose our purpose.  
Let us measure our lives by how well we love our neighbors, all our neighbors.  
And Lord, let us forget ourselves and get caught up in the beauty, power, and majesty  
of your selfless love being spread from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth.

Just as we graciously accept Your Son and Our Savior's forgiveness over every avenue of our lives.  
We ask that you would, through the power of the Holy Spirit, exalt His Lordship over every avenue of our lives.  
It is in His name that we pray. Amen.