

Lesson 3

Throw out the Bad Fruit

If you've had any experience with a GPS or use a navigation system for driving directions then you are familiar with the following phrases:

- Recalculating
- Make a legal u-turn as soon as possible

My anxiety level rises dramatically when I hear that little computerized voice. In layman's terms, "recalculating" means "You aren't following my directions!" And the command to make a u-turn means, "You're going the wrong way! Turn around immediately and go the other way!"

Plant: What does fleshly fruit look like?

Like these GPS warnings to drivers, certain things should raise a red flag in our faith if they are present in our lives. In Galatians, Paul refers to these signs as "acts of the sinful nature." These attitudes and behaviors are contrary to the Spirit and what He wants to produce in our lives.

Read Galatians 5:19-21 from the New Living Translation below.

¹⁹ When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, ²¹ 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. Galatians 5:19-21, NLT

Grow: Is our life growing any fruit of the flesh?

Circle any fruit of the sinful nature in the passage above that sometimes pop up in your life.

This list in Galatians is not exhaustive. Paul merely gave the believers in Galatia a sample of the fruit of the flesh. And everyone will struggle with different things. Let's read two more passages from Paul's letters to broaden our understanding of "the acts of the sinful nature."

Read the following passages (maybe in more than one translation) and list any attitudes or behaviors that your sinful nature tends to produce.

Ephesians 4:22-32 and 5:1-7:

Colossians 3:5-10:

The presence of these attitudes and behaviors reveal that sometimes we allow our sinful nature to win a spiritual battle. If you're like most Christians – including me – your life does produce some fleshly fruit from time to time. We still occasionally choose our own way over God's and reject the "way out" He promises to provide when we're tempted (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Plant: What can we do to get rid of the bad fruit?

Believer, whether our lives have produced a handful of fleshly fruit or an abundant crop, God's desire for us is less "acts of the sinful nature" and more "fruit of the Spirit." In the remainder of this lesson we are going to prepare our lives for the Spirit's harvest by weeding out the bad fruit and tilling our heart for the Spirit's work.

Read James 4:1-10.

Jesus' brother James wrote to Christians caught in a cycle of sin. They had proudly rejected the leadership of the Spirit and chosen their own way. Distance from God, difficult relationships with God's people, and a harvest of fleshly fruit were the result. But James commanded a remedy. I can hear him saying, "Make a legal u-turn as soon as possible!"

List phrases and words (vs 1-4) that describe their relationship with God and other believers.

Look back through verses 6-10 and list all the verbs you can spot that describe the actions a Christian should take when we've chosen our own way over God's (I spotted 10).

These actions characterize true repentance. Sometimes Christians merely give lip service to repentance. But until we humble ourselves before God, grieve over our sin, and turn away from it we have not experienced real repentance. We must make a u-turn!

Read 1 John 1:9. How does God promise to respond to our repentance?

Today's lesson has been very personal – and maybe even painful. We all have bad fruit in our lives. But, praise God, He does indeed allow u-turns! Take some time this week to sit quietly with God and work through getting rid of the fleshly fruit. In the meantime, let's talk more about the process of repentance:

Was there anything in James 4:6-10 about repentance that surprised you? Maybe an attitude God calls us to adopt or an action you previously have not considered part of repentance.