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CHARACTER OF CHRIST

Do you have a clear concept of the life you want to live?
What is it?

Do you understand the differences between drifting with
your circumstances and cutting your path in life? What
are those?

What does it look like in your life to choose the fruit of
the Spirit in response to terrible circumstances?

How does it feel to live this response?

Galatians 5:22-25 – ²²By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

I) Who You Are...

Living the life you dream is confusing and hard. It's confusing because there is no agreed standard of the perfect human life. Just deciding what your dream life is will put you at odds with many who want to project their dream upon you. Many of these are people for whom you care deeply and will grieve their disappointment. Once you decide on your dream life, you need a standard that defines it. Most standards of life are ineffectively vague and shifting. Those that are firm and rigid prove your weakness as you fail to live up to them consistently in all ways. What are you to do? Jesus did not leave you earthbound to struggle in misery. He left you here with a clear statement of yourself and the strength to ignore the noise and cut a firm path. Let's look at that statement and examine how we live the story of His life through ours.

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◆**Look deeper:** We look like our neighbors. We seem to experience life in the same way. We share some likes and dislikes. Our commonalities give an instinctive sense that we are different versions of the same thing. One day, we begin taking our commonalities for granted and defining ourselves into groups by our differences. These shifting perceptions cause some of our confusion over who we choose to be. Jesus also divides humanity into two groups: those who live as victims of their circumstances, and those who live freely. When He starts to tell you your story He says, “By contrast... (Galatians 5:22).” Yes, we are attracted to the idea that we will live differently.

◆**Defining qualities:** Satan would have us worship creation as the most glorious and terribly powerful force. That is why our flesh, that scared and furious inner voice that will give anything for peace and prosperity, is a victim of circumstances. The threat of pain provokes fear and anger. The opportunity for pleasure excitement and devotion. Jesus offers an unchanging way of life wholly incompatible with ways of the flesh. He says that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (v22-23).” These reinforce each other into an integrated being of integrity. These are complementary, offering a simple life without the complication of deciding moment to moment which of our many faces to show.

II) How You Came to Be...

A passive life drifts on the flow of circumstances. At moments one will choose to change perspective, spinning one way or another, but still relentlessly drifting with the flow. For some, this is the extent of the change sought when encountering Jesus. He is not passive, though. He is purely assertive. He knows who He is and how to live that life. He invites us to follow Him in a life of agency—freedom. Something we had never known till that time. Living assertively requires breaking free of old bonds and shedding them completely.

◆**Breaking free:** Our flesh wants to drift on the current. Each event in life seems the only one that matters. Drifting, we react to each without regard for the consequences. Those beget some new event and the cycle repeats. When we choose to “belong to Christ Jesus (v24)” we are not allowed to drift. He transforms our view by teaching us that the Law is not restrictive but the wide boundary of freedom, saying “There is no law against such things (v23).” When we break free, we have the liberty to live our dream. Breaking free is to choose to abandon the flesh. As a result, we “have crucified the flesh... (v24).” This is a

tortuous death in which it will howl as we force it to endure undesirable circumstances to cut our path. We must be fierce to break free of its grip on us, ignore it, and carry on.

◆**Shedding:** We cannot live freely in the image of Jesus while honoring the flesh. It will not change its ways. We must shed the old, dead thing that hangs on and weighs us down. We have to peel off and discard “its passions and desires (v24).” These will continue to misdirect us into reacting to the current of our circumstances. This requires living intentionally for the purpose of expressing Christ’s character. Sometimes this goes with our circumstances, often not. Often, we put our face into the current and march upstream.

III) How We Go...

This is too daunting. We’ve only known the flow of circumstances, following the whims of our flesh. Having always avoided pain or gotten away from it as fast as possible, we are terrified of remaining in it. What will happen to us? How can we be joyful while enduring suffering? By not going alone. We go together with the Spirit, who both sustains and leads us.

◆**Revived:** Like many infants, the flesh is weak compared with circumstances but forceful while demanding response. As it suffers, it howls and cries so loudly we cannot hear our own inner voice directing us to the life we choose. Christ did not leave us alone. He gave us the source of life and now “we live by the Spirit... (v25).” Unlike the flesh, the Spirit is strong compared to circumstances. He revives us when confronting lack, fatigue, hunger, jealousy, rejection, temptation. Living our dream is choosing to believe the Spirit makes us capable of the same for the purpose of producing the fruit of Christ’s character. The harsher the circumstances, the more vivid the appearance of the fruit.

◆**Venture on:** He does not revive us in one event that we can return to our lazy drift with the current. We are revived to live our dream. Each circumstance we wade through proves we can wade through the next. We are cutting our path through the current of circumstances to be the person of whom He will be proud. Jesus challenges us, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit (v25).” He does not want us to drift this way and that, living miserably, only invoking His power in the most extreme circumstances. Once we experience a moment of life in the Spirit, He wants us to know we can enjoy that power always. It is not fleeting. He and His power are constantly with us. We can bear fruit in every season if we choose to live in faith that He is our trustworthy guide.