

## Discipleship Groups — Level 7

### WEEK 5 | Women

### Life Check: Character

Hello ladies. Thank you for joining us for Class five of our Women's Discipleship Groups. We have been examining our hearts as it instructs us in 2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV), *"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves."*

This week we are going to dive deeper into the character test. Character is who we are when no one is watching. Who we are behind closed doors. How we react to challenging situations, what we say and what we think when we don't have someone to impress.

Unfortunately, we live in a world that isn't character-driven and is focused largely upon appearance, especially with social media! We've modeled actors and influencers in magazines, movies, Instagram, TikTok. Even in our own daily life, at work, school, the grocery store or even church, we see other women and want to be them based solely on their external appearance, unaware of their sincere character. We follow women on social media and see filtered images of their best moments, with flawless lighting, perfectly placed coffee cups, journals and bibles. Then we read AI generated captions leading us to believe that what they are sharing is their true personality.

But is it? For some influencers I believe they do share truth, raw emotions and Christ-centered revelation, but I would suggest that many of the "picture perfect" women that we follow and long to be like, are just as vulnerable and in need of Jesus as we are. We need to come to a point where we stop wanting to be other women and become the women God wants us to be.

What does that woman look like? Well, we could go into Proverbs 31 and compare ourselves to the woman of noble character, but we don't have that much time! So, we are going to use Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT) as our gauge, it's a little less painful but nonetheless it is a good test of our character. It says, *"But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!"* If we use this scripture to test our hearts we can see if we are becoming truly transformed.

Since we're talking about the fruit of the Holy Spirit let's take a look at some fruit right now. You see, I'm holding up two bunches of grapes. One's artificial and one's real. The fake grapes look perfect; they almost look real enough to eat. The problem is that they have no life, they don't grow, they don't need water and they won't bear fruit. They're hollow on the inside. This is what many people are like spiritually. They have a beautiful appearance; they look good in public and know how to say the right things. They may look like they have it all together but, on the inside, they are empty because they have no spiritual character or fortitude. They want you to think they are model Christians,

wearing their scripture apparel and gold crosses, but down in the depths of their souls they are dying and longing for life.

Now if we look at the real grapes, we see the imperfections and slight remnants of dirt, the defects in it actually contribute to its beauty. We know that it developed from a seed and eventually transformed into something we can eat because it is REAL and it gives LIFE! Hopefully this is the kind of Christian that we want to be. Yes, it's imperfect and has its flaws, but it's growing with life, producing good seed that will fall onto good soil. In Matthew 7:20 (NLT) Jesus says, *"Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions."* God is not concerned with how perfect we look on the outside; He wants us to become more like His Son on the inside. We are to be set apart and identified as people who treat others with kindness, grace, mercy and forgiveness. Our reactions, our attitudes, our words are evidence of whether God is at work in us.

Now let's take a look at this. You obviously can see that these real grapes have been cut from the vine. Eventually they will become dehydrated, turn into raisins and die. How many of you have ever felt spiritually dehydrated, like you're hanging on for dear life? You feel like you're going and going and going, as though you're being pulled in so many directions. You're trying to balance the bible studies, the volunteering, going to church on Sundays and then again on Wednesdays. You genuinely love the Lord and you WANT to spend quality time with Him but you can't seem to find it. You've noticed your bad reactions, your impatience, your horrible thought pattern and you know something's off. Well, it is, you are off. You have fallen off the vine. It isn't intentional but in the busyness of life we sometimes find ourselves detached from the vine.

In John 15:4 (MSG) it says, *"Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me."* Our character can only change if we stay connected to the vine. THIS IS THE KEY ELEMENT – we have to stay JOINED TO CHRIST! When we do this, then as it says in Psalm 1, we become hydrated by the rivers of living water and produce fruit in every season. Whether we accidentally fell off the vine or did it intentionally, once we refocus on Jesus, then we begin to see ourselves responding to strangers with love and gentleness, we start choosing kinder words, we begin to face confrontation with less anger and more humility and we start to see how peace fills our atmosphere because we are JOINED IN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD. There is NOTHING within US that can make this kind of change except the POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT!

I mean it says it right there in Galatians 5, *"the Holy Spirit PRODUCES this kind of fruit in our lives."* He produces it. It isn't about us getting a list of nine character traits that we need to perfect all day, every day. God knows as women we don't need another list of things to do. AGAIN, hear me loud and clear, the HOLY SPIRIT IS THE ONE PRODUCING THE FRUIT, that's the beauty of it. It's HIS JOB and all we need to do is be willing vessels that stay connected to the source. The transformation will come. It's a

process and it's going to take patience, but we get to go through the process WITH JESUS! That's exciting and powerful!

So be encouraged. Continue to abide in Christ and develop your relationship with Him because that's the only way our character will look anything remotely like His! Take time this week to respond to the reflection questions. Be willing to receive an honest answer from the Lord as we ask Him to show us our character flaws. Look, we all have them, but we can trust God with our imperfections. The important thing is that we stay connected to Jesus and allow Him to do the work in us.

Now let's close in a quick prayer. *"Heavenly Father, help us to abide in you. Holy Spirit reveal to us the areas of our character that need refining. Transform our hearts and help us to grow and bear good fruit as we choose to abide in you. In Jesus name, Amen."*

God bless you; I'll see you next week.