

The Pressure's Off: A Better You

By Janice Kerper Brauer

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your study of the Word.

Opening

I confess. I like to look at “before” and “after” photos in women’s magazines — the kinds that show how a new hairdo or a different make-up technique can help you look better. If popular magazines are an accurate gauge, today’s women are searching for ways to improve themselves. Besides tips for our physical appearance, there is a plethora of articles on how to have better careers, better marriages, better friendships, and on and on!

“Better” Christians?

Sometimes we carry this self-improvement mindset over to our walk with the Lord. We even compare ourselves to other believers and wish we could be better Christians. What a relief to discover that is not the way it works! The Christian life is not a do-it-yourself project; it is a walk of faith. Read the verses listed below and discuss together the insights they provide about what it means to live as God’s redeemed children. The questions that follow are provided as starting points for your discussion.

Galatians 2:15–21 **Galatians 3:3–11**

Galatians 3:23–27 **Galatians 4:4–7**

Galatians 5:13–16 **Galatians 5:23–25**

What does Paul say about how one is justified?

What does Paul say about how one lives as a believer?

What is the significance of being sons and daughters of God rather than slaves?

How would you describe the role faith plays? (Try to put it in simple terms, as if you were explaining it to a child.)

Why is the Holy Spirit essential?

What do you think it means to walk by the Spirit in your daily life?

Spirit-Empowered Discipleship

What comfort we have as God’s children in knowing that the power for the Christian life comes from the Holy Spirit and that even our faith is a gift from God. This doesn’t mean, however, that discipleship is passive. Read the following verses and note how St. Paul encourages us to actively express our faith.

Colossians 3:8–14 **Colossians 3:18–19**



Colossians 3:23–24 **Colossians 4:2–4**

Colossians 4:5–6

Keep in mind that Paul’s instructions do not imply that we are able to obey these Scriptures by our own power or that following them earns us God’s favor. Rather, walking “worthy of the Lord” (**Colossians 1:10**) is the joyful, Spirit-empowered response of the life that has been gripped by God’s love and grace. What do the following verses tell us about what God has done and continues to do for us?

Colossians 1:10–15 **Colossians 2:6–7**

Colossians 3:1–3

Closing Reflection

Allow a few minutes for individual reflection or for group sharing. Glance back over the Scriptures we have studied: How does understanding who you are in Christ help you move beyond a self-improvement approach to life? How is the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart about your walk of faith? How can you draw upon the power of the Spirit in the week ahead?

Thank God that He changes from the inside out! Divide into two groups and use these verses from **1 Corinthians** as a responsive prayer:

Group 1: By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who has become our wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

Group 2: So let those who boast, boast in the Lord!

Group 1: You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified ...

Group 2: in the name of the Lord Jesus and the Spirit of our God.

Group 1: There is one God, the Father ...

Group 2: and we exist for Him.

Group 1: There is one Lord Jesus Christ —

Group 2: and we exist through Him.

Group 1: Thanks be to God,

Group 2: who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

All: TO HIM BE GLORY FOREVER, AMEN.

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