



# BLOOM:

A GROWTH GATHERING



Welcome to *Bloom*! There's nothing more exciting than women who long to grow. Here at Hope City, we believe we're stronger when we're growing together. One lone flower in a mound of dirt is pretty, but fields of blossoming flowers singing across a meadow? Simply stunning.

For the next four weeks, we're going to look at the process of growth. What happens after we fall in love with Jesus? How do we move past shallow beliefs to authentic change and mature behavior? Like a seed that's planted in good soil, there's a process at work within us. Under the surface of who we are or who we've been, God is growing a fresh bloom. It doesn't matter if you're brand new to faith or a woman who has walked with Jesus for a long time, there's something exciting about new hope, new freedom, and a fresh revelation of authentic joy.

The good news is that you don't have to grow alone. Imagine a sunflower sweating, screaming, or beating itself up because it's not developing properly! Sunflowers have a remarkable ability to take their petaled face and follow the path of the sun across the sky. The key to their growth is following the light and warmth of what sustains them, and it's the key to our growth too. We follow the Son.

Each week you'll engage in a deep study of God's Word and the beautiful encouragement of the women longing to grow beside you. We'll not only study God's word; but apply His principles to our lives and the lives of those around us. Sweet *Bloom Sisters*, let's do this together.

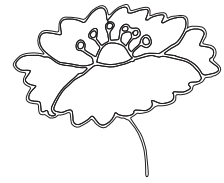
— **Pastor Jennifer, Gari Meacham and the Hope City Women's Team**

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## Week One:

# SEED POWER



There's something inspiring about a field. There are vast mounds of dirt and wild grass waiting to be tamed, to become fruitful, and boast a meaningful crop that sustains and nourishes. This is the image God repeatedly uses to teach us about faith: fields ready to be sown with fresh seed, promising new growth. It's a lofty idea, but how do we make it real in our day to day lives?

When I taught third grade science, one of the units we covered was plant life. We'd take white Styrofoam cups and place just the right amount of soil in the bottom. Then, each student would lovingly place a seed in the soil and cover it. The cups sat on the windowsill receiving a small amount of water each day until miraculously, little stems and leaves appeared. We'd shout in amazement as the plants grew so tall, they danced across our windows. To this day, I'm still amazed by the miracle. How do tiny hard seeds bring beauty and life?

If we could cut open a seed and watch its power in the soil, we'd see several shocking things happen. A seed has a protective coat around its shell that keeps it safe as it begins to grow. Inside the seed is an embryo (baby plant) that begins to stir. Through a burst of energy stored in the seed, a plant takes shape. As the seed starts to grow, one part becomes the stem and the other becomes the root. Both form at the same time. The stem grows up and the root grows down. Even when a seed is upside down in the soil, it *will right itself*. The seed's main goal is to reach the sunlight because the light and water will sustain it.<sup>1</sup>

When we come to faith in Jesus, a new life is planted within us, and through the power and patience of the Holy Spirit, we begin to grow. Much of our growth depends on the kind of soil we supply to nurture the seed. Jesus has a lot to say about seeds and soil.

Please turn to Matthew 13 and read verses 3-9. What are the four places Jesus described seeds landing and attempting to grow?

The disciples tried to understand this growth principle, but ended up confused. Jesus went on to explain more in verses 18-23. Read these verses and discuss the soil types described below. As honestly as you can, think about the type of soil *your* life reflects.

- ❖ **Roadside Soil:** This is the soil right next to the path. Many people hear the truth of God's word and promises, but don't understand them. They may flirt with a relationship with Christ, but the evil one quickly snatches the seed sown in their hearts. Confusion, apprehension, or a general sense of disbelief replaces what might have grown into faith.
- ❖ **Rocky Soil:** Rocky soil is typically hard soil. These people hear God's truth and happily accept it. But because they don't have deep roots, they don't last for long. The minute problems pop up (*relationships, finances, health issues, rough times*), or they face persecution of any type (*Why do you believe that? You Christians are so close-minded!*), they fall away.
- ❖ **Thorny Soil:** Thorny soil is tricky because thorns can be hard to spot. A seed can be growing and flourishing, but suddenly thorns begin to choke out that growth. Jesus mentioned two types of thorns—*worry* and the *deceitfulness of riches*. It's interesting that Jesus coupled worry with

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<sup>1</sup> Explanation adapted from [www.people.southwestern.edu](http://www.people.southwestern.edu), Southwestern University>kryst196 and Gari Meacham's book *Beyond Free*, First Place for Health.

finance and money issues. Worry is a sister to fear. She's the nagging voice that fear hides behind, and women tend to struggle with worry more than any other thorn to faith. And then there's money—either lack of it or pride in having it—can take faith and snuff it right out.

- ❖ **Good soil:** Good soil is soil that longs to produce a harvest. Because it has overcome the evil one, shallow faith, and the thorns of worry and deceit—it bears fruit that is useful to others and beautiful to God.

As honestly as you can, think about the type of soil *your* life reflects. Don't fake it—we're here to help each other grow.

The good news is every single believer has felt like their faith was, at times, shallow, rocky, or pierced by thorns. But thankfully, with hope, stamina, and perseverance we keep allowing the nourishment of God to help our seed grow.

Turn to Psalm 1:3. How does the Psalmist describe a tree firmly planted?

The Bible promises when we delight in Him and meditate on what He says (Psalm 1: 2), we will yield fruit in each season, we will not wither, and whatever we put our hands to will prosper.

Let's think about this for a minute. What season of life are you in? Are you a student, mama, new wife, executive, co-worker, mentor, new to faith or seasoned and matured? Are you currently flourishing, or do you sense you're beginning to wither? How does God's promise to prosper your season, bring hope?

Prospering doesn't mean you'll get fancy cars or a big mansion (although there's nothing wrong with these things, it's just not what the Bible promises.) This type of prosper refers to a peace in your soul that won't fade. Growth is a process and peace is the proof. As we grow, peace begins to replace the rocky, hard, and thorn-laced soil of our lives.

## BLOOM FOCUS:

One of the best things about scripture is that we get to watch people just like us, mature and grow. This week, we'll focus on one of the most relatable Apostles: Peter.

Turn to Luke 5 and read verses 1-11.

In verses 1-3, what is Peter doing while Jesus is teaching the crowd?

It's safe to say that Peter and his crew are more interested in cleaning their nets than listening to life-changing teaching from their future Savior. Talk about rocks and thorns. Peter's ears may have perked up when he heard Jesus speak, but the pressure of fishing and his love for the catch overshadowed the words of Jesus. It's important to remember that Peter was an uneducated, manly fisherman. He wasn't sitting in church pews singing hymns. His language was probably colorful, and his arms and legs tanned from the weight of carrying boats and loads of fish.

What did Jesus ask Simon Peter in verse 3?

Of all the boats on the shore, he asked Peter for *his* boat to teach from. Even before Peter cared about Jesus, Jesus cared about him. What does Jesus say to do in verse 4 and how does Peter react?

Most translations note that Peter called Jesus “Master” in his response, which was far from loving. It was like saying “Mister, we’re the fisherman and we already tried what you’re telling us to do...” How often do we do the same thing? God invites us to something deep and new, and we roll our eyes with a “been there, done that” attitude.

There comes a time in all our lives when Jesus tells us to push out into the deep. We must go into dark waters where we can’t see the bottom. It may feel lonely as we leave other people on the shore—or completely unpredictable as we leave the comfort of what we know. The truth is, if we don’t go deep, we’ll never get to the blessings he longs to give. Blessings of trust, hope, wild faith, and intimate growth are on the other side of our obedience.

What happened when Peter pushed out into the deep, and what was his reaction to Jesus as he saw the blessing?

When we truly encounter Jesus, we’re reminded of who we are without Him. I love how Jesus reached Peter through what meant the most to him: fish. Notice it wasn’t the deep teachings of Jesus, or his reputation for healing that brought Peter to his knees in worship—it was the catch of fish. This is important to understand. Jesus invites us to a deep place of trust that centers on what we care about the most. What’s your fish? Is it your family, your desire for a spouse or children, your dreams for a career or impactful ministry? Is it to be healthy, to be free of an addiction or generational cycle of destruction or defeat? You may be able to quickly identify your “fish,” and you may sense an overwhelming desire to simply hear from the Lord and trust Him deeply.

Share with your group what you consider the deepest longings in your life.

Now, have someone read out loud the final statement from Jesus in verses 9-10 and the reaction of Peter and his friends in verse 11.

Sisters, this very day Jesus invites us to put out into the deep with Him. That’s how our seed of faith will grow. Peter didn’t understand his future or know where this new decision would take him. He only knew there was no turning back. There is no satisfaction in the life he had before.

Next week, we’ll talk about how to handle seasons of *waiting* as God waters and nourishes our faith under the covering of the soil. Let’s pray together as we end our time—and know we’re cheering for you wildly throughout the week. We’re watching for the stunning bloom that’s arising from your faith.

## **BLOOM PRAYER:**

*Jesus, we thank You that You care about what we long for the most. Peter thought he needed fish, but he really needed a Savior. Strip our minds and hearts of distractions and diversions that may keep us from going deeper with You. There’s nothing more sure or exciting than learning to trust You in fresh new ways. We say yes to Your invitation and push out into the deep together. Holy Spirit, nourish our faith seeds as we look to You for our growth. Amen.*



## Week Two:

# UNDERCOVER GROWTH

In a world that values quick fixes and readily available things, the concept of *waiting* is becoming harder to grasp. I heard a story about an older gentleman seated at the food court of a mall. A group of teenage girls were on their phones and began to complain about the slow internet service they were experiencing. After ten minutes of nonstop complaints, the gentleman commented: “Give it a minute, girls; the signal’s going to space!”

Truthfully, we’ve all become accustomed to quick answers and speedy access—but spiritual growth doesn’t happen that way. Like seeds planted in dark brown soil, our faith germinates in ways we can’t see. Under the blanket of the soil, the hard exterior that was planted begins to change.

The key to spiritual growth is recognizing God is working in all our circumstances to bring us to maturity—and true maturity means looking more like Jesus Christ. This isn’t a quick process because layers of insecurity, wounds, selfish ambition, offenses, confusion, wandering, and sneaky pride are shed as new growth emerges. We must be willing to remain in the soil of God’s garden as He tends to our growth—not constantly trying to push ourselves to the surface before we’re ready. Pastor Jeremy often says, “If Satan can’t stop you, he’ll rush you”—and I know it’s true. Because I’m a “Get it done!” type of girl I’ve rushed God on countless occasions, only to crumble in disappointment when things don’t work out.

The flip side to rushing growth is to stay in the dark soil and never emerge. This often occurs because we are too scared, overwhelmed, or paralyzed by thinking we’ll never be right or strong enough to matter. The good news is God is the gardener and He causes the growth. If we simply surrender who we are to His capable hands, He provides everything we need to succeed and emerge beautifully formed. Here’s a simple way to understand growth:

### **Life Surrendered to Christ + Internal Growth Timeframe = God’s Glory**

Think about your own life. Which of these Internal Growth factors do you sense God is nurturing underground?

- Surrendered circumstances
- Increased stamina (the ability to stick with something over a period of time)
- Humility (letting go of ego, pride, and the need to be constantly recognized)
- Trust versus control
- The capacity to love God, others, and yourself in deep and meaningful ways
- An increase of supernatural faith to replace fear, worry, bitterness, anxiety or apathy

Please turn to Philippians 4:4-9. What does Paul tell us to do as we are in the process of growth? (verses 4-6) What should we think about and what is the result? (verses 8-9)

Verse 9 brings such hope as Paul says "...practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." Thank goodness he acknowledged that it takes *practice*. None of us master faith quickly. It takes time and seasons to grow and change.

## BLOOM FOCUS:

One of the best ways to comprehend a new way of thinking is to follow a story through a series of change. No one had a conversion story quite like the Apostle Paul. He was a mean, compulsive, murderous man; driven by a religious spirit. No matter how many times I study his story I'm still encouraged by the way Jesus encountered him, and more important, led him away for a season of growth.

Please turn to Acts 9:1-9 and read the passage out loud.

Imagine this scene: Paul is on his way to harm Christians and Jesus meets him face to face and asks, "Why are you persecuting Me?" Isn't it interesting that what Paul thought was helpful to the kingdom of God was hurting Jesus? Have you ever been hurt by someone who thought they were doing you good?

It took three blind days and a faithful man named Ananias to help Paul see the light. At first, Paul was so overcome with new faith he began to shout the truth of Jesus to anyone within earshot.

Read verses 19-30. Why do you think the disciples would send Paul away to Tarsus when it seemed he was having great impact on the culture?

This was Paul's first season of extended growth. It was a timeframe in which God took Paul away from the action rather than placing him smack in the middle of it. There will be seasons of your life when God is growing you deeply, and it will feel like you're moving away from where you want to be rather than closer to your goals. Be patient. Like Paul, he's bringing you to greater knowledge, more compassion, and the true understanding of His nature and will.

Have you ever felt left behind or left out of God's powerful moves? When you see Him move boldly in other people's lives do you wonder if He'll move in yours? How do you handle seasons of growth where God seems silent?

It's interesting to note that Mother Teresa often struggled with what she called "A silent God." At times she begged God for the understanding of poverty, pain, and the unfair struggle some people seemed to bear more than others. She eventually came to realize "power is perfected in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12: 9) I find it comforting to know that everybody goes through seasons of growth where they may feel forgotten, confused or alone. Typically, it's in these seasons that our capacity to trust God *alone* grows.

Let's finish by reading how Paul later describes his time away from the initial action. Please turn to Galatians 1:11-24. Have someone read these verses aloud.

Paul said he was "set apart" from his mother's womb and *called* by God's grace, but for three years he was in the desert of Arabia—not exactly glamour and ministry action. Then, at just the right time in his growth process God led him to Peter and the growing church. It was from there that Paul set out to several unreached regions in need of the Gospel.



Do you feel like you're in a desert season (learning, set apart for preparation, building your skill set), or are you in a season of launching out? How are you hearing from God in this season?

Sweet Bloom Sisters, *you* are set apart and called—and even if you're in an underground season of growth—miracles within you are happening.

## **BLOOM PRAYER:**

*Lord Jesus, I get in such a rush. I want things to happen quickly and in predictable and painless ways. Give me the capacity to wait—to allow You to teach and sustain me until You decide it's time for me to set out. I confess my need for control and ask you to replace it with a deeper sense of trust. From this day forward, I'll set my mind to view seasons of waiting as times for your underground growth. Instead of fighting it, I will lean into it with You. And as I grow, let my lips be filled with praise and my heart full of thanksgiving.*

## Week Three:

# THE POWER OF FRUIT



My oldest daughter married a winemaker from the rolling hills of Napa Valley. As far as your eyes can see grapevines cover the landscape—making it one of the most beautiful places in the country to visit. But if you look at the grapevines closely, for many months they’re almost bare. A tight bud begins to form on the vine that will endure months of rain, freezing temp, sunshine, and the occasional help from the winemaker’s special fertilizing touch. These vines are a far cry from the lush reddish-purple fruit that soon becomes the prize. Yet, this is the *exact* process of growth that Jesus used to illustrate spiritual maturity to his disciples.

On the night of the last supper, Jesus had so much to say it seemed as if he talked nonstop for hours. Immediately following the meal, feet washing, and conversation about the Holy Spirit’s role in our lives; Jesus asked the disciples to get up and leave the upper room they were meeting in. Scholars believe He led them through a garden in the valley of Kidron full of grapevines, and with actual vines in His hands, He began to teach about spiritual growth.

Please turn to John 15:1-8 and have someone read these verses out loud.

## BLOOM FOCUS:

Immediately Jesus lays out the roles of those involved in the vine process. Let’s take a minute and see who does what.

### ❖ **Jesus: the true vine**

The vine is typically referred to as the trunk. It’s the connector to the root system, the access to the water, and the strength and structure to uphold growth. Jesus is the root, the living water, and the trunk that holds all the branches together in strength.

### ❖ **The Father: the vinedresser**

The vinedresser is the owner and keeper of the vines. His task is simple: to coax the most fruit from a branch as possible. The vinedresser tends branches, protects them, picks them up when they’re broken or have fallen, covers them in a freeze, and does *whatever it takes* to bring them to a harvest.

### ❖ **Us: the branches**

We are the branches that grow from the true vine (Jesus) that’s tended by the vinedresser (the Father.) According to Jesus’s words in this passage, our job is clear—to abide in Him. Abide is translated “to remain.” Jesus repeats this exact word several times in this passage. If we remain (abide) in Him, our lives *will* bear fruit.

Jesus doesn’t beat around the bush (or grapevine)! What does He say in verses 4-5 to clearly remind us of the limited power we have to force our own growth? How do His words make you feel?

Jesus talks about two different kinds of branches in this passage: non fruit-bearing and fruit-bearing. Who and what is Jesus talking about when He used this description?

**Non fruit-bearing branches** are those that hang on the vine but have completely turned their backs on God after making a superficial commitment. Branches that bear no fruit season after season suck the nourishment from other branches that truly want to flourish. They can also infect the healthy branches with disease.<sup>2</sup>

It's not our job to judge the fruit of others or fret over branches we love but are disappointed in. Our Father, the perfect vinedresser, is always nurturing broken branches back to health. As a matter of fact, one winemaker described what he does with branches that have been severed from the vine and left for dead. Instead of throwing them away, he still tries to tie them to the other branches, hoping they'll eventually graft back into the vine. If, after all else fails and the branch continues to show no hope of trying to graft in, the branch will die away from the vine.

**Fruit bearing branches** are believers who are committed to loving and serving Him. Jesus is directing most of His comments in this passage to believers that are locked in and want to bear fruit, but don't always know how. When Jesus said, "You're already clean" in verse 3, he was telling them "You don't have to clean yourselves...it's already done." We waste time trying to continually clean ourselves when Jesus is trying to move us towards bearing fruit.

As a group, think about this question: Do I spend time feeling guilty or wallowing in former mistakes? This is a distraction to new growth. This is *your* time to realize Jesus has plans for your life... to bear fruit.

Reread verses 7-8. What does Jesus instruct us to do in verse 7?

These are some of the most dynamic words in the Bible. He begins with the word "If." "If you abide (remain) in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish; and it will be done for you."

Our job as the branch is to simply remain in Jesus and keep his words inside us. It sounds easy, but how does that look practically?

- First of all, it begins with relationship. Jesus is a beautiful Savior and friend; not a distant, dictating God. He walks with you, talks with you, smiles with you, enjoys being with you. Abiding in Jesus means we long to be with Him, and even when our emotions feel bland or distant, we call out to hHm and tell Him we "want" to want Him. He understands how hard it is to be human!
- Second, His words abide in us when we know what He's said and the characteristics of His voice. The best way to know His words is to read the Bible and make it your own. "The Bible is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit. It's able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12) If you're trying to make it on podcasts, blogs, social media memes, or worship songs in your car—although these are wonderful additions, they're not the meat. You need the solid foundation of

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<sup>2</sup> Life Application Bible Commentary, The Living Bible.

the word continually feeding your spirit. Sitting in this Bloom Group is a great way to abide in Jesus as we study the word together. Well done!

Jesus says the sheep know the voice of their shepherd. The more you hear His voice, the less you'll be influenced by fake counterfeits.

Discuss as a group how *you* abide. What does abiding in Jesus look like to you? How can we encourage each other when we feel distant or confused?

Jesus' main goal for your life is that you will bear MUCH fruit. Statistics show:

- ✓ 50% of believers bear no or little fruit (They've accepted Jesus but not walked closely with Him afterwards)
- ✓ 45% of believers bear some fruit
- ✓ 5% of believers bear much fruit

In order to get to the "much fruit," category we need to understand the principle of **pruning**. Pruning is the cutting away and shaping of the vinedresser on those that are already productive. The Father doesn't prune those that aren't bearing fruit. So, if you're in a season of pruning (cutting away, pulled back, set apart, stripped of things, feeling a bit isolated or alone) take heart! Much fruit is on its way. But we also need to realize the Father disciplines those that are choking out fruit. There's a difference between disciplining and pruning. Disciplining comes from those bearing no fruit, and pruning comes from lives that are bearing fruit.

As a group, look at the difference between disciplining and pruning and reflect on what God's doing in your life to bring much fruit.

ISSUE	DISCIPLINING	PRUNING
How do you know it's happening?	Pain	Pain
Why is it happening?	You're doing something wrong.	You're doing something right.
What is your level of fruitfulness?	No fruit	Some fruit
What is the vinedresser's desire?	Fruit	More fruit
What needs to go?	Sin	Self
How should you feel?	Remorseful	Relief, trust
What is the right response?	Repentance (stop sinning)	Release (give God your permission)

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Dr. Bruce Wilkinson's *Secrets of The Vine* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2001),66.

Although the idea of discipline and pruning may feel harsh—it's the only way our lives will bear more fruit. For years, I had the concept of bearing fruit for Christ confused with working hard at Christian and ministry activities. I wrote books for Jesus, taught classes, lead conferences and even started a place for women and children in Uganda called—wait for it—The Vine! It's taken me a long time to finally realize a life that bears fruit may not be the busiest or flashiest. Fruit represents the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors that God values because they glorify Him. Plenty of people can lead someone to Christ without being fruitful in many areas of their lives.

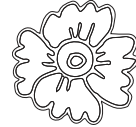
Next week we'll talk about the two types of fruit the vinedresser is looking for—inward and outward fruit. This week, take some time to ponder the fruit of your life. The Vinedresser is patiently working to bring you much fruit.

## **BLOOM PRAYER:**

*Father, we look to You as our vinedresser—the one who carefully and gently leads us toward growth. We yield to Your process rather than be overwhelmed by it. If we are blocking Your growth by any willful actions in our life, we confess it as sin and turn away from it this minute. Fill us with Your peace as we surrender our will, habits, and behaviors to You. If we are being pruned, we thank you that You are getting us ready for breakthrough, for new harvest, for a fresh new season of growth. Jesus, You are the vine, and we are the branches. Without You, we can do nothing. So, with full surrender and confidence in the process of Your hands, we ask You to bring our lives to much fruit. Amen.*

## Week Four:

# FULLY BLOOMED



Each winter my husband chops our trees and bushes down to sticks. I always feel a bit panicked, and wonder if the plants will ever truly bloom again. It's hard to imagine blossoms when all you see are barren twigs. Yet, this is the process God has selected for growth. Unless we are pruned, we won't become the full and beautiful fruit-bearers we're created to be. Sure enough, each spring new growth begins; and our trees and bushes get bigger, produce more blossoms, and look healthier than the year before.

Remember, God's goal is for your life to bear fruit. And not just a little fruit...a lot of it!

In order to understand what this looks like, it's important to note there are two types of spiritual fruit: *inward* and *outward*. Let's look at the inward fruit first, because nothing flows outward that hasn't first been dealt with on the inside.

The Apostle Paul writes a letter to the Galatian churches powerfully describing the inward fruit of the Spirit. Sadly, the reason he had to address this so strongly was the churchy people of the region were trying to lay impossible behavioral burdens on the new converts to Christ. In an attempt to explain what it means to bear inward fruit—Paul had to expose the opposite.

Please turn to Galatians 5:16-26. Notice how the deeds of the flesh compare to the fruit of the Spirit. Which "flesh deeds" do you struggle with the most?

In order to understand the inward fruit that grows as we abide in Jesus, we must remember that "*fruit*" represents the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors that God values because they are most like Him. The Holy Spirit's will in our lives is in constant conflict with sinful desires. The two are on opposing sides of the spiritual battle. So, as we move towards the fruit of the Spirit and behaving in the ways described to the Galatians—our inward fruit grows while the cravings and impulsive acts of the flesh diminish.

Let's list the nine inward fruits and see where we feel we're the strongest or need the most work.

***love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control***

I used to think once I mastered one of the nine things on the list, I could check it off and never return to it. Little did I know I'd spend a lifetime still growing in each of these areas. The Life Application Bible says, "The Spirit produces character traits, not specific actions. We can't go out and *do* these things, and we can't obtain them by trying to *get* them. If we want the fruit of the Spirit to develop in our lives, we must recognize that all of the traits are found in Christ. The best way to grow them is to join our lives with His."

Over the years I've come to see how this plays out. Let's say you struggle with being gentle. Your personality is more like a charging horse than a gentle pony—and you know it's caused problems in the way you behave. Our Father (the vinedresser) will continue to bring you opportunities to practice. The opportunities are usually situations that cause you to react anything but gently! Yet, instead of responding with criticism, yelling, annoyance, sarcasm, silence, or rough bristling—you could react gently and grow some fruit. If you continue to choose the uglier reactions, God will continue to bring opportunities to grow that specific fruit. Remember, it's His goal that you bear *much* fruit—and in order to do that, we must grow in the reflection of these nine traits.

What does Paul remind the Galatians of in verse 24-25? How does knowing this help us grow good fruit?

Now let's look at this from another lens. When you commit to growing spiritually and bearing much fruit, you are literally giving God seeds to sow into your personality and circumstances. Turn to 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. What's the principle Paul describes in verses 6-8?

If we commit to little change and growth—little is what we'll see. But if we commit to great growth with a cheerful heart; he increases our harvest. What is a result of this increase and capacity to change? (vs. 13-14)

People will actually give thanks to God for you and yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God *in* you.

## **BLOOM FOCUS:**

Now let's see what happens when inward fruit turns to outward fruit. Watch how the touch of Jesus transforms even the most confused and wayward woman. Her choices were bad, her history was bad, and her future was bleak...until Jesus.

Please turn to John 4:1-14. What is the woman's reaction to Jesus' request for water from the well? (vs. 11-12)

It's funny how we often tell Jesus that a situation is too hard for Him. This woman didn't know she was speaking to the Creator of water—and she tells Him the well is too deep and He has no rope or bucket. Do you ever tell Jesus situations in your life are too hard for Him?

Jesus went out of His way to go through a region that suffered from great prejudicial problems. Samaritans and Jews had no dealings with each other. They stayed in different neighborhoods and ran in different circles. He was also intentional in His conversation by meeting her alone. The disciples went to run an errand and Jesus purposely used this time to impact a lonely woman in a profound way. What did He ask her in verse 16?

When Jesus asks this woman to "Go get your husband and come here!" he knew she had an issue with men. Before she could lie, he told her everything about her past. She'd had five husbands and was living with a man now—this signals a real problem. Because she didn't know what else to say in response, she retreated to religious jargon (vs. 19-20) but Jesus is bringing her back to the point—growth and change

of character. They have a beautiful exchange of truth and in one encounter with **the** Living Water, this woman is set free from her pain and past.

Now, let's turn to vs. 28-30. One translation describes what happens like this:

*"Then the woman left her water pot beside the well and went back to the village and told everyone, 'Come and meet a man who told me everything I ever did!' So the people came streaming from the village to meet Him."*

Bloom Sisters, Jesus does the same for us. His calm nature sears through the outer layer of our protection, fear, poor choices and religious smokescreens. Like this transformed woman, we leave behind whatever we've been carrying and head to tell people the good news. She hadn't mastered all the fruits of the Spirit. Truthfully, she only knew the eyes of Jesus in a short conversation, but that was enough. Her character was changed; and she simply *had* to share what she had experienced with everyone! What's been your response to the power of an encounter with Jesus? How has He spoken into your life—gently uncovering your lies?

As we close our time together, we remember that growth is a process and Jesus is the point. As we walk this path of growth together as women of Hope City, let's remember these words of Jesus: "By this is my Father glorified, that your lives bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples."

With full hands and gushing hearts—we're cheering you, sweet sisters, "Bloom girls, Bloom!" We're in this together!

## **BLOOM PRAYER:**

*Jesus, we come to You in love, and ask You to bloom inside us. We pray to be so beautifully consumed by You that nothing else would hold our attention. Like a sunflower that moves its face to follow Your warmth across the sky, we pray to move our face in only Your direction. Lord, help us to love each other and pick one another up when we see another woman feeling low. Help us to have eyes to see the ladies who are forgotten or those who get passed by. Jesus, as we end our time with these sisters and new friends, let our hearts be knit together in love. In Your matchless name we pray. Amen.*