

Galatians 5:19-23 | “From the Inside Out”  
*Preached on August 29, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown*

Please turn in your Bibles to Galatians 5, verses 19 through 23.

We are in the middle of a short, little 3 week sermon series called, “Walking by the Spirit,” found in the second half of Galatians 5.

In this series, we are seeing the chief way that we grow in a life of godliness...

...By living our lives by the power, direction, and guidance of the Holy Spirit within us.

And I want to READ OUR PASSAGE so that it’s fresh on our minds, as we embark on this journey of discovering what the Bible tells us here in Galatians 5. *[pauseeee]*

If you did something sinful, what caused you to do it?

Now I’m not talking about situations where you are almost forced to do something sinful, I’m talking about the everyday, run-of-the-mill, willful sin. *[pause]*

What leads you to be mean to someone else, to be envious, or to burst out in anger?

Don’t think about all the various details of the situation of what others did to influence you to do it, or how you were just very tired.

...Think of just, what ultimately led you to sin? *[pause]*

What leads people in our world to do injustice, oppress others, and fight all the time?

It comes from what’s happening inside. *[pauseeee]*

When you squeeze a tube of toothpaste, what comes out?

Toothpaste, of course.

Flowers wouldn’t come out, fruit wouldn’t come out, diamonds wouldn’t come out, and chocolate wouldn’t come out - though that would be nice, wouldn’t it? *[pause]*

Toothpaste came out because toothpaste was what was on the inside.

So also, when we sin, it’s because of what’s happening inside. *[pause]*

Our sinful actions come from our sinful desires.

Something deep down is driving you to want to do something, so then you give into that desire. *[pause]*

We sin from the inside out, and we do good from the inside out, for we either walk by the Spirit or the flesh.

We either gratify sinful desires, or we let the Spirit guide how we act. *[pauseeee]*

Here in Galatians 5, Paul is showing us how we can no longer be slaves to the Law, yet still do what's right.

Because this freedom and "just walk by the Spirit" talk sounds so ambiguous, and it sounds like people could use it to do whatever they want.

It seems to be *not* like the Law, which tells you exactly what to do and not to do. *[pause]*

That's why in this passage, Paul is showing us the way we can know that we are walking by the Spirit or not - the fruit of our lives.

And in doing so, he will also show us that the Spirit produces a life that doesn't go against the Law, but a life that actually fulfills the Law. *[pauseeee]*

So he will contrast a life led by the flesh and a life led by the Spirit, showing us the evident results seen in the way we live, which reveal what's going on inside. *[pause]*

*So he first tackles the fleshly results, as he shows us that...*

### **I. Being led by fleshly desires results in fleshly deeds. (19-21)**

The reason Paul gives this list is to give objective evidence to show whether one is following the flesh or the Spirit.

He's showing us what relying on the flesh leads to.

This is where life apart from the Spirit goes. *[pauseeee]*

Imagine a very young child relying upon their own wisdom, where does it typically lead? To foolish choices.

They put their finger in the electrical socket, they touch a hot stove, they jump on the bed.

Each of those examples are examples of following their own wisdom and the results are getting shocked, getting burned, or getting hurt.

So that's what it's like when we follow the flesh, there are not good results. *[pauseeee]*

Paul calls these "works of the flesh" and he says that they are "evident."

This is because the sinful desires that someone has are inside of them, but the acts are not.

When one consistently gives into their flesh, acts are going to come out and be evident to others.

There's going to be strife, outbursts of anger, and immorality.

Paul's saying, "You're going to see the works of the flesh, it's not going to remain hidden from everyone." *[pauseeee]*

Just look around at our world and you will see these deeds all over the place.

This is the natural, God-less orientation and outcome of sinful humanity. *[pause]*

People wonder why the world is so messed up, and it's because of sin, it's because sinful humans without God follow after the flesh. *[pauseeeee]*

What these works of the flesh indicate to us is that sinful deeds have a source, they don't pop up out of thin air.

All actions have a source; desires lead to actions.

You do something for a reason, and because of desires within you coming from the inside out. *[pause]*

We sometimes say, "I can't believe he would do that!"

But Paul's saying, "I can. It's coming from giving into the flesh's desires."

So that's why Paul calls them "works" or "deeds" because these are actions, which come from the driving influence of the flesh, the sinfulness of humanity. *[pauseeee]*

These are "works" of the flesh...

And in using the word, "works," Paul may also be making a stinging remark here because the Galatians were trying to do the works of the law in their own power.

But here's the truth: one can try to do works in order to save themselves, but end up producing the works of the flesh instead. *[pause]*

A prime example is the Pharisees.

They tried to keep the Law in their own power, but what was the result?

They were angry, prideful, divisive, envious, and murderous people, who played a part in putting Jesus Christ to death.

That sounds like the works of the flesh, right? *Exactly.*

Trying to do good things on your own actually does the opposite, it produces a sin-filled life.

So never think, "I just need to do good in my own power," for that is living by the flesh, and it won't produce the change you want, but it will do the opposite. *[pauseeee]*

Now let's get to the list of the deeds of the flesh.

We don't have time to go into detail into each item here, but a brief overview will be sufficient.  
*[pauseeee]*

You know, it's easy for someone to look at this list and think, "I don't do these exact things, so I'm good."

But Paul wants people to think about what this list represents, and even makes it clear that this list is not exhaustive, for he says, "and things like these."

Really, Paul's point is the sort of lifestyle that these deeds represent.

So not everyone driven by the flesh will show each of these items, or even to the same degree as others.

So keep these things in mind as we look at the list closer. *[pauseee]*

If you notice, this list points to sins done in different categories.

There's sex, religion, relationships, and drinking.

Let's take each category individually. *[pause]*

In the sex category, there's sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality.

These terms together show us that Paul is pointing to all immoral sexual relations, that is, sexual sin in general.

Specifically, 'sensuality' is unrestrained immoral behavior, and a lack of control over oneself, especially in excess. *[pauseeee]*

Next are the religious sinful deeds, for you have idolatry and sorcery.

Idolatry is of course worshipping something other than God.

Sorcery is a term we don't use as much but it's essentially witchcraft, and often back then they would use drugs in pagan religions.

So both of these terms show a desire to get in touch with spiritual things in a man-made way.  
*[pause]*

The next category is relational sins.

This would entail: enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and envy.

Isn't it interesting that Paul gives a ton of items when it comes to relational sins?

This is because it happens all the time, and it's often overlooked by people as not as bad as the other things.

We think, "Oh, I just had an outburst of anger, but at least I didn't sleep with someone else."

Yet Paul adds all of these relational sins in the same list as sexual sins, idolatry, drunkenness, and sorcery.

He shows us that someone may not be out drinking and being intimate with others, but they are following the flesh just the same if they are divisive, angry, conflict-seeking, or envious people. *[pauseeee]*

That's the relational sins, and the last category are alcohol-related sins.

You have drunkenness and orgies.

Both of these involve the abuse of alcohol, and orgies refers to parties involving excessive drinking. *[pauseeee]*

So as you can see these are not good things, and these are the works that come from a person being led by the flesh. *[pause]*

So think about this for a moment with me...

The fact that these things come forth because of the flesh means this - you can't say, "That's just how I am, I can't help it."

You can't say, "I'm just a very sexual person," or, "I just love my alcohol, that's all."

You can't say, "I know that I burst out in anger, but that's just how I am."

No, it's sin, and it's because you are being led by the flesh.

God didn't make you with a short temper, we are sinners and when we *don't* walk by the Spirit, we are following what the flesh wants. *[pauseeee]*

Now if you look at this list, what are the major threads that come out of it?

First, they all demonstrate *self-seeking behavior*.

It's the mentality of: "I want it, I want it now, and I will get it!"

They demonstrate selfishness and self-indulgence, for it's all about you and what you want. *[pause]*

You have sinful desires rise up and you think, "I want to feel good, so I will look for any way to do it," and then you give in.

So it says, “I have sexual desires, and I want them fulfilled now, so I will do it.”

When it comes to drinking, it says, “I just want to escape it all, feel good, and have a good time.”  
[pauseeee]

The flesh wants what it wants, so it turns things into idols in the heart, and uses things to try to get its way. [pauseeee]

These deeds of the flesh demonstrate a life that says, “I want my way, and I don’t care what any other person wants, and I don’t care what happens.”

This is seen in the fits of anger, enmity, strife, division, and others.

Or, even in envy or jealousy, the flesh says, “I want what that person has.” [pause]

This is why the flesh can lead to unrestrained, excessive sin because it’s ultimately self-seeking and self-indulgent. [pauseeee]

So as you can see, the flesh is all about self, but what’s another thread woven throughout this list?

You find many *relationship-destroying sins*. [pause]

Following the flesh leads to enmity, strife, division, fits of anger, etc.

These things utterly destroy relationships or can destroy a community. [pause]

Think about it: how can a relationship or community thrive when someone or a bunch of people are all self-seeking?

It can’t!

There is strife, rivalries, discord, jealousy, anger, and dissension.

You think that’s going to promote a healthy relationship or community? Think again.

That kind of behavior doesn’t reconcile or build up relationships, it divides them. [pauseeee]

If you want to know how you are doing in regards to these things, look at your relationships with others.

Are you rarely at peace with others? Is there always conflict? Are there tons of bridges burned?

Count how many relationships are strained with others in your life - that’s a clear sign whether the works of the flesh are showing up in your life or not. [pauseeeee]

These deeds are evident in individuals' lives, but can also be seen in a church.

If there is constantly strife, division, fits of anger, dissension, discord, and rivalries - that's a clear sign that the works of the flesh are at play in a church. *[pauseee]*

You see, when people are led by the flesh, they are self-seeking, which results in messed up relationships and divided communities. *[pauseeeee]*

And what's one more thread that this list shows us? It shows us that God is "dethroned" in the heart.

God can never actually be dethroned, but he can be "dethroned" in a person's heart.

What I mean by that is that God is disregarded because when you give into the flesh's desires, what are you saying?

You are saying, "I don't follow God, I follow what I want."

You are saying, "I don't trust God, I trust my own control."

You are saying, "I don't want to please God, I want to please myself."

And so God becomes someone in the way of what you really want, or He becomes someone that you use to get what you want. *[pause]*

Ultimately, in the person's heart, God is "dethroned" and self is enthroned in His place. *[pauseee]*

Do you see why we absolutely need God to live godly lives?

Left on our own, we are self-seeking.

Following after our sinful selves only leads to sin, damage, and destruction, so that's why we need God's Spirit to change us and to help us live for God. *[pauseeeee]*

After giving this list, Paul gives a serious warning about the reality of those who do these kinds of things: they "will not inherit the kingdom of God." *[pause]*

Wow, that's a strong statement, right?

But it's true, it's a big deal, and so it's meant to get our attention. *[pause]*

Yet what does Paul mean here? Does this mean that if we do one of these works of the flesh one time that we won't be saved?

Well it's important to know that the word Paul uses here for "do" actually means to "practice" such things.

So this word *doesn't* mean occasional lapses, but rather that your lifestyle is characterized by such things.

If you are someone who repeatedly does these things without repentance, then you will not inherit the kingdom of God, for your life is evidence of the fact that there is no Spirit within. *[pauseeee]*

Philip Ryken's commentary says this, "Paul is not talking about Christians who from time to time commit one of these sins against their better judgment, all the while knowing that they are grieving the Holy Spirit and wishing that they could stop.

Rather, he is talking about people whose lives are dominated by sin, who are committed heart and soul to immorality, idolatry, sorcery, and envy."<sup>1</sup> *[pause]*

Even John Calvin says of this verse, "The saints themselves are heavily burdened, but they return to the way..."

All the threatenings of God's judgments call us to repentance, for which pardon is always ready with God; but if we continue obstinate, they will be a testimony against us."<sup>2</sup> *[pauseeee]*

So it's pointing to someone who practices these things.

Their lifestyle is characterized by these sorts of things, and they don't really care.

So the very fact that you are concerned about your spiritual walk and striving to not do these things, reliant upon God, is most likely a sign of the Spirit within. *[pauseeee]*

Paul is also realistic, he knows that Christians do these sins from time to time and are still saved.

A little later in Galatians 6:1, he says, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness."

He shows us that Christians can get caught in sin.

It is easy to fall back into walking by the flesh, so we need to be led by the Spirit, and that's when we will start to see more and more fruit of the Spirit grow in our lives. *[pauseeee]*

You can't lose your salvation, and this isn't works salvation, for Paul has been stressing justification by faith in Christ alone.

But rather, the person who practices the deeds of the flesh demonstrates that they don't have the Spirit. *[pauseeee]*

So by communicating the deeds of the flesh, Paul is showing us what actions the flesh produces in people.

This reminds us that our actions don't just come out of nowhere, for they have a source.

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<sup>1</sup> Ryken, Philip Graham. *Galatians* in the Reformed Expository Commentary series (2005), page 232.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy George quotes John Calvin in *Galatians* (Vol. 30, p. 398, 1994), Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.



And so this list gives us objective proof of whether we are giving into the flesh's desires, or if we are letting the Spirit lead us.

So let this list direct you to evaluate your life - are you letting the flesh control you or the Spirit?  
[pauseeee]

Let's say that you realize that you do one or many of these vices.

The remedy isn't to think, "I just need to stop it," or, "I need to stop in my own power."

For as this passage shows us, it's deeper than that, for it's coming from a battle within: the battle between the Spirit and the flesh.

So the solution is to "walk by the Spirit".

Rely upon God to empower you to live rightly.

Trust Him each moment, call out to Him in dependence, follow His leading, dwell on His Word.

And when you do this, over time, what will happen? The fruit of the Spirit will start to show more and more.

*That leads me to the second point...*

## **II. Being led by the Spirit results in beautiful, Christ-like fruit. (22-23)**

What a contrast in these lists!

One produces immoral behavior, relationship-destroying behavior, and God-less behavior, while the other one produces beautiful, relationship-enhancing behavior.

And the difference is between the flesh and the Spirit. [pauseeee]

Before we get to the list, let's first look at the word, "fruit".

First, why does Paul use "works of the flesh" and then change the imagery to say, "fruit of the Spirit."

He not only went from works to fruit, but he also went from plural, "works", to singular, "fruit".

There must be a reason he *didn't* say the works of the flesh and the works of the Spirit.

And I believe one reason is because works point to mere human effort, while fruit points to something that only the Spirit can produce.

So think of it this way: the works of the flesh, you can take all the credit for, but the fruit of the Spirit, you can't take credit because it was the Spirit within you. [pause]

That's probably the reason for the change in imagery, but why go from plural to singular?

Well he uses ‘fruit’ singular because like a tree doesn’t produce different kinds of fruit, so the Spirit doesn’t produce different kinds of fruit.

They are all a part of one kind of fruit.

As one commentator put it, these fruit are like, “nine different facets of the same dazzling jewel.”<sup>3</sup> *[pause]*

But also, they are called fruit, singular, because every true Christian will have all of these, albeit in varying degrees.

This isn’t like spiritual gifts where we each have only one or only a couple.

This isn’t like a fruit stand where we pick and choose which ones we get.

But this fruit is a total package, which the Spirit gives a Christian - it’s a harvest of the Spirit.

And like the earlier list, Paul’s point is once again the entire lifestyle they represent. *[pauseeee]*

So let’s think about some characteristics of fruit for a moment.

First, fruit is attractive, nourishing, and life-giving - that’s what these fruit are like.

If you see these things in a person, it’s a beautiful thing, and their relationship with you will most likely be more pleasant.

Because if someone is loving, kind, faithful, gentle, and full of joy - isn’t that someone that you want to be around? Of course! *[pauseeee]*

Another characteristic of fruit is that fruit takes time to grow.

When you first become a Christian, you can’t expect to see all of this fruit in your life right away.

It takes time for the Spirit to grow them, and we each see the different fruit in varying degrees in our lives. *[pause]*

Just think about 10 or 20 years ago.

Are you more or less loving, kind, and patient as you once were?

Typically, we grow in these areas as we live the Christian life, and it takes time. *[pause]*

Throughout our lives, it’s a constant, slow process of fruit growing and growing in varying degrees.

Meaning, my joy may not be at the same level as my love, but both are growing. *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>3</sup> Ryken, Philip Graham. *Galatians* in the Reformed Expository Commentary series (2005), page 234.

One more characteristic of fruit is that fruit always comes from a source.

Fruit doesn't just pop up in your garden out of nowhere, but it comes from a source.

So also, these fruit *only* come from the Spirit. *[pause]*

This fruit doesn't come from merely working hard, trying more, or just because that's who you are.

This fruit is fruit *of the Spirit*, and therefore only God can produce these things in you.

**It is fruit that comes from the tree of the Spirit.**

And that demonstrates that we can't take credit for the fruit of the Spirit displayed in our lives, for it was ultimately God's work. *[pause]*

Jesus makes this clear in John 15 when he says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."<sup>4</sup>  
*[pauseeee]*

True godliness comes from the Spirit alone.

It's not the fruit of self-effort, it's not the fruit of your personality, or the fruit of your upbringing, it's the fruit of the Spirit!

And this means as we walk by the Spirit, he produces this more and more in our lives.

**By yourself, you can't produce these things, but as you rely upon and trust God, he grows these things more and more. *[pauseeeee]***

One very clear application of this truth is this...

We can't expect change or true lasting progress in godliness from people who don't have the Spirit.

We can only expect people to live godly lives, if they have the Spirit. *[pauseeeee]*

So often we try to change symptoms.

We look at the world around us and the evil that goes on: the sexual immorality, sensuality, drunkenness, and anger.

**And we think that unbelievers need to just change, and stop doing this or that.**

But why are we trying to change symptoms? Don't we know that these deeds come from a source?

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<sup>4</sup> John 15:5.

They come from the heart, they come from the flesh, and therefore they can only be changed by God's grace saving them and God's Spirit working in them. *[pause]*

This is why the only hope for the world is the Gospel!

We shouldn't be shocked that unbelievers do the works of the flesh, for they don't have the Spirit.

Only the Spirit can bring the change needed, so we cling to and proclaim the Gospel as the only hope for sinful humanity. *[pause]*

Recently, when there was a big outcry about injustice in our nation, some so-called "Christians" were upset that other Christians were sharing that the Gospel was the answer.

But what were they thinking?

The Gospel *is* the power, for we are saved by believing the Gospel and then empowered to live right by the Spirit within us! *[pause]*

The Gospel is the only hope to remedy injustice, corruption, and deep-seated anger.

So don't lose focus, but proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to everyone, for it is truly the only hope for true and lasting change. *[pauseeee]*

Moving on, let's get to the list, shall we?

Once again, we can't go into detail into each virtue, but I'll give a brief overview of the threads that come out.

First, each of these fruit demonstrate *Christlikeness*.

Consider this list, and each one is a character trait of Christ.

He was loving, kind, gentle, patient, and all the others.

He perfectly displayed these fruit in His life.

So a person showing these fruit in their lives will be a Christ-like person.

And this makes perfect sense since it is the Spirit producing these things in our lives.

For He's only going to produce what is in line with His character. *[pauseeee]*

Another characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit is that many of them are others-focused, relationship-enhancing qualities.

The deeds of the flesh were self-seeking, relationship-destroying actions, while the fruit of the Spirit is others-focused and relationship-enhancing. *[pause]*

To be loving, you need to be others focused, and not self-seeking.

To be gentle, patient, and kind - you have to be others focused, and not self-seeking.

And these things build healthy relationships and communities. *[pause]*

Imagine being a friend to someone loving and patient.

Imagine being a co-worker of someone who is kind and gentle with you.

And now imagine a church that is filled with people who show these fruit, that's going to be a healthy church community.

There will be love, peace, patience, and kindness displayed. *[pause]*

Many of the fruit of the Spirit are relationship-enhancing qualities. *[pauseeee]*

One more characteristic of this fruit is that they show someone whose king is God.

Because God has been loving and kind to them, they show love and kindness.

Because they know that God is in control, they have peace and joy. *[pause]*

Think of it like this...

If you trust God's plan and promises, then you have peace and joy.

If you trust God's timing, you are patient.

And so what happens is that you start living out His character because He is so good to you, and you start trusting Him in situations, allowing you to have greater joy and peace. *[pause]*

You realize that you don't need to get your way, for you are trusting His way is right.

You're content in God, what He gives you, who he has said that you are, what he has promised, so you don't need to get that person back.

You don't need to get your way and start a fight or division among people.

You don't need to be jealous or envious of people because you have everything you need in Christ.

What a difference this makes! *[pause]*

So what we see is that the Spirit doesn't just prevent us from doing the works of the flesh, but actually produces positive, beautiful virtues in us.

This is the great work of the Spirit in a person's life! *[pauseeee]*

Do you see any of this fruit in *your* life?

Of course, we won't see these things perfectly, as we still sin, but there should be indicators of this fruit in your life.

And we also have these things in varying degrees, and it takes time, so don't be discouraged.  
[pause]

This is a life-long process.

We often look at things and expect immediate results, but God often works in slow processes.  
[pause]

The work of the Spirit is a life-long work, and it happens as we walk by the Spirit.

So the key is not to merely roll up your sleeves and strive in your own effort, that's like trying to keep the Law.

But rather, it's saying, "Lord, I need You. I need You to work in my heart and produce these things.

I need Your help, for You alone can bear fruit in my life. So help me today to look to You in everything, to demonstrate Your character, and to keep going to You for the strength."

That's the mindset we need!

It's pure dependence, submission, and reliance upon a good God to work in us. [pause]

We certainly have to actually live, think, and act - but we do so in reliance upon God to work in us to do these things. [pause]

We will fail and sin, but we admit that to the Lord, rest in His forgiveness, and look once again to His aid.

This is the Christian life, and when we live this way, over time the Spirit bears fruit in our lives.  
[pauseeee]

And in verse 23, Paul says, "against such things there is no law."

There is no law against the fruit of the Spirit because they are good things, and no law is needed to restrain people from doing what it leads to.

So following the Spirit doesn't lead to sinfulness, but Christlikeness. [pauseeee]

Paul is simply showing his readers that we may not be under the Law, but the Spirit is not lawless.

The Spirit is not opposed to the law, but shows that it is fulfilling the Law.

That is, the Spirit produces what God wants. *[pause]*

This means that freedom in Christ, and living by the Spirit and not the Law, is not freedom to sin and do whatever you want.

But it's living a life guided by the Spirit, who leads us to godliness. *[pauseeeee]*

*So what does this passage show us? It shows us that...*

**How we live is a reflection of what's going on inside of us, so will you be led by the flesh or the Spirit? *[pause]***

Our actions indicate something, and they come from a source.

**Either we are being led by the flesh or the Spirit.**

What about you?

**Will you live in your own strength and wisdom? This will only lead to the deeds of the flesh.**

Or will you live by the power and guidance of the Spirit? This will lead to beautiful, Christ-like fruit. *[pause]*

We don't just focus on behavior and try to change it there - that's like putting a bandaid on a broken arm.

Instead, we focus on what's deeper, for that's where true lasting change comes from.

**It comes from what's driving us to do things - it comes from the inside out. *[pause]***

So will you give each moment to the Lord?

**When you go to talk to that person that you are having some issues with, will you ask the Spirit to give you the words to speak?**

When you start to feel yourself wanting to lash out at someone, will you ask the Lord to help you respond in a loving way?

**When you feel yourself being joyless, will you ask God to restore to you the joy of His salvation?<sup>5</sup> *[pauseeeee]***

You see, the fruit of the Spirit goes back to how we are walking by the Spirit, and we can only walk by the Spirit because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**For Christ's work has forgiven us and made us children of God, who are now indwelt with the Holy Spirit.**

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<sup>5</sup> See Psalm 51:12.

And so because of this work, now we can have love, joy, and peace and show these virtues in our lives. *[pause]*

So let's celebrate the grace of our Lord, who died for us and paid the penalty for our sin out of love and grace.

Let's stand in awe at the power of our Lord, who rose again.

And let's rejoice in the giving of the Spirit, who sanctifies us. *[pause]*

All of this was done out of grace, so now we live by grace, dependent on His power to help us live godly, fruit-bearing lives.